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Any resemblance between any character appearing in fictional matter, and any person, living or dead, is entirely coincidental and unintentional.

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THE CAMP-FIRE

Where Readers, Writers and Adventurers Meet

SEVERAL newcomers this month to swell the ranks of our ever-growing Writers' Brigade. First, let's give the Air Force a break and hear from Sergeant Robert Elliot, USAF, who contributes the brief but gripping vignette of World War II—"The Major"—on page 116. This is one of two pieces the sergeant sent us recently. The other—"Village in Normandy"—will appear in an early issue. Although Elliot is not a professional writer, we were impressed by the graphic realism of his account of the reactions of men under fire. You can tell he's been there—as the soldier in the movie "Battleground" said: "That's fer dang sure." Incidentally, Elliot refuses to be pinned down as to whether his material is straight fact or partly fiction. Here's what he has to say about "The Major"—

He was a real man, though I've forgotten his name now, and he really did tell the corporal to take the prisoners out and shoot them, although he couldn't have meant it. He was pretty well shot, as far as nerves go, and used to say a lot of things that the men never took notice of. However, the corporal was a machine-man and did what he was told, regardless. I don't think the major has ever quite gotten over that day.

H-F is in reality the village of Hubert-Folie, a mean little place south of Caen but because of its position turned out to be a fairly important place.

To be quite honest, I don't know how to define the stories as fact, which they are, or fiction, unless I start right out and say—"This is what we did one day over in France—" and I don't think that would be worth the paper it's written on. All I can say regarding these stories is that they actually did happen. In some cases, I was there and saw, in other cases I heard about the things that happened from friends of mine who were there. In any event, the stories weren't written to prove anything, they are simply some recollections of mine that I thought might be worth something to a publisher.

About myself. I enlisted in the Canadian Army in August '41 and picked up my discharge in February '46. Between swearing in and getting out, spent time in Canada, England, France, Belgium, Holland and Germany. Landed on D-Day with the 3rd Canadian infantry division and was with them all through the campaign of northwestern Europe.

After discharge worked in a factory for a while, then on a weekly paper in Erie that didn't pan out so well. Signed up in the AF in March '47 and put in a year in PIO at Maxwell AFB, Alabama, before winding up here in Alaska. Leaving here within the month for discharge in the states where I will re-up again. No use in wasting three years, might as well make it twenty and get something out of it. [Sergeant Elliot is now back in Alabama at an Air Force Base there.—Ed.]

BOB YOUNG, who gives us the amusing fact story about Shorty Harris—"The Most Low-Down Man" (page 110) stands up to be counted, with a brief biography and a tall tale or two—

I'm a newspaperman by inclination, but at the moment I'm between newspapers, so to speak. I sold the San Gabriel (Calif.) *Sun* last December and have been doing free-lance writing since. I've placed articles with *Mammoth Western, Big Book,* and *Fifteen Western Tales,* and am warming up on a novel. (About William Walker, incidentally.) Besides the *Sun,* I have owned another newspaper and was editor of a daily in the Philippine Islands during the war (for the Army) wherein one story I wrote made world-wide news, and was discussed by Drew Pearson on his Sunday evening broadcasts. Other background includes a B.A. from the University of Nevada, (1940) and a spell at dealing in one of the Halls of Chance in Reno (poker).

As you can see by this letterhead I am married and have a brood of three boys, ranging from 8 to 2. [Bob's letterhead lists the entire Young family: Jan, Mike, Tim,

(Continued on page 8)

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(Continued from page 6)

Gary, and Bob himself.—Ed.] My wife Jan writes for the "confession" magazines, and has placed with Westerns as well. All this at age 33; and a native son, too.

My interest in Shorty Harris was aroused when I read a tall tale accredited to him, where he discovered a legendary vein of gold that he was able to remove in sheets, just exactly the thickness of coins. All he had to do was to take it to the mint, and they'd stamp twenties right out of it for him. And the one where he discovered a deposit of alum, and went back to record the claim. During his absence a rain fell, and he was never able to relocate the claim. The reason was that the water just made the alum pucker up and close up the hole entirely.

AND here is Norman Bacon, author of "The Fire Boss" (page 86) with a few nostalgic notes on his early childhood and a bit of background on his exciting tale of the men who fight fires in our great forests—

To begin, I was born in Coos Bay, Oregon, in 1911. The first six years of my life were spent in a log cabin in the wooded hills of the Coast Range. I believe it was these first formative years that have influenced my continuing love of the outdoors. The cabin sat on a bench high above a long, green valley. There were no houses in the valley, nor on the hillsides. Far away, at the end of the valley, the Pacific Ocean was a dim, blue stretch on the horizon and occasionally we could see the slow smoke of a tramp steamer across what was, to me, the edge of the world. There was honeysuckle over the cabin, a hundred foot spruce beside it, and behind, above us on the ridge, seven giant fir trees were rowed up like the columns of the Parthenon. When the rain blew in from the ocean, their tops were lost in the clouds.

At the age of six, my parents took me by the hand, led me out of this paradise into town, introducing me to the subjects of readin', 'ritin', 'rithmetic and nasty little boys who taught me how to shoot spitwads at teacher.

During the ensuing years I have lived entirely in the Pacific Northwest, mostly in the logging towns and camps of the region. Am married to the best cook this side of anyplace, and am presently employed in the experimental division of an aircraft firm.

The background for "The Fire Boss" came from an actual experience fighting a fire on the Colville Indian Reservation of eastern Washington State, close by the Idaho line. The fire got away from us that day and we ran until we were out of breath. At last, thinking we were safe, we

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A TRUE I. C. S. STORY *taken from an actual letter*

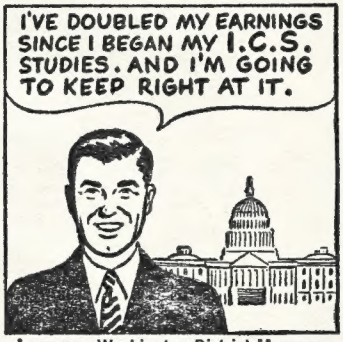
I was a World War II pilot . . .

A prisoner of war in Germany . . .

Back home, I was hired by National . . .

Studied with I. C. S. in my spare time . . .

I. C. S. sent reports to my employer . . .



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(Continued from page 8)

slowed to a walk in the apparent quiet and serenity of the virgin forest. Then fire started dripping around us and, looking up, we saw that the pines above us were burning. . . . There's absolutely nothing like it to bring back a tired man's vitality.

The character of Hogue came from a man I knew in an Oregon logging camp. He was six feet tall, broad as a barn door and so tough he peppered his eggs with thumb tacks. Being somewhat of a button-nose at the time, I followed worshipfully in his footsteps until one hectic evening his girl friend—a painted lady—took a shine to my unsullied innocence and made a pass. The gentleman was not unobserving and I was lucky to get out of this with a whole skin. But I had gotten to know the fellow pretty well and since have wondered about him, wondered what made him the way he was—tough, embittered, mean and an obvious misanthrope. Thus Hogue and "The Fire Boss."

GEORGE Gurley, who wrote "Cross-wind"—the punch-packed story of the trapper and the bush pilot (page 72) confesses that at 25 he is getting bald and is, to date, unmarried. He was born in the Windy City but now calls Ardmore, Oklahoma home. After a three-year interruption in his journalism studies at the University of Oklahoma (the three years were spent as a bombardier in the Air Corps) he returned to the university for his degree, then started out in newspaper and magazine work.

MANY thanks to Reader Ed Lewis of Oakland, California for the following account of his experiences with a giant devilfish—his letter was inspired by recent *Adventure* yarn concerning that terrifying denizen of the deep—

I have just enjoyed the story "Bait for a Devilfish" by Don Lawson in the July issue of the book. Also read the comment on this story in the *Camp-Fire*.

During the fall of 1947 I was Chief Engineer of the American Liberty ship *Moses Brown* when she was ordered into San Marcos Island in the Gulf of California to load gypsum for Seattle, Washington. I learned about devilfish, or manta rays there.

We were loading at a "T" dock with the ship across the end of the dock and with conveyer belts bringing the gypsum out to a loading chute. This dock is about one half mile long. About ten o'clock one forenoon, with the sun shining bright and the weather very hot, there was a sudden commotion among the Mexican children and women that were fishing off the dock. Seeing them pointing to the water in an excited manner, several of us went down onto the dock and saw a very big manta ray approaching the dock slowly and not more than five feet under the surface of the water, which was clear and light green in color. He came in about like a ship intending to dock, so slowly that he seemed to be drifting.

Within ten feet of the dock and the bow of the ship he stopped, seemed to take a long look, went astern a few feet and turned ninety degrees to head inshore. He then slowly started to inspect the dock from a few feet out, traveling slowly inshore. He moved so slowly that no movement of his flippers or tail could be seen nor was there any visible agitation of the calm water. Some forty to fifty people, walking slowly, kept opposite him. Amid much loud shouting and noise from the Mexicans, not to mention the noisy belt conveyer machinery that was shaking the dock, and many chunks of gypsum thrown at him by the young boys and girls, that fish calmly kept on his inspection of that dock. He utterly ignored us all and the only true description of his attitude is one of absolute insolent lack of fear of human beings.

When chunks of gypsum as large as baseballs hit the water above him, as they were thrown by the kids, several of them sank slowly through the water and came to rest on his broad back. He simply ignored them, not bothering to flip them off, until they fell off as he swam along.

At one point the dock had some pilings missing from it and he stopped there for several minutes as though he was thinking of going under the dock at that point. He headed into that space slowly and came to a stop with his flippers almost touching the pilings on either side. He was so big that each flipper tip was out past the pilings at least three feet. Afterwards some of us took a tape from the ship and measured the distance between these pilings. It was 20' 4" and we all agreed that he must have been something more than 26 feet across.

He went inshore until the water shoaled and he was at the surface to keep from going aground, then he turned around and again slowly came back out to the end of the dock. This whole trip in and back out took about 30 to 40 minutes and he was followed by the large group of people, myself included, all the way. I have spent a lifetime at sea and about the world but I have never seen any wild animal ashore, nor any fish in the sea, that was so utterly without fear of people as this fish was. He just didn't give a damn for anybody. Even porpoises, that are noted as being friendly, will become afraid if there is great commotion about or if rocks are thrown at them.

(Continued on page 125)

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A Tale of the Frontier Cavalry

ILLUSTRATED BY HAMILTON GREENE

THE BROILING Arizona sun beat down on the sweat-soaked backs of the cavalry, and the men of D troop, what was left of them, sagged wearily in their saddles. They were slack-faced men, vacant-eyed from exhaustion and battle, dulled by the monotony of route march, and the screech of saddle leather, and the incessant rattle of loose steel. Once in a while one of them would rise out of the stupor that had grasped

HELL COMMAND

By CLIFTON ADAMS

They seemed to fly down the hillside now, the thin line of grim-faced men.

them and wonder out loud if maybe, sometime, they would ever reach Carter's Wells.

Up ahead, in front of the column, Senior Sergeant Kirkpatrick and Martin Swain, the hired scout, rode together. They had buried their last officer two days ago back at Morrison's Ranch, after a bad brush with a Cheyenne hunting party. So Sergeant Kirkpatrick was now the acting troop commander.

Which was all right with Swain. The sergeant was a good man—as good a top soldier as was likely to be found, if missing a few of the social graces befitting an officer and a gentleman, as they say. But the sergeant didn't give a damn about social graces as long as he could get a bullet into a red hide now and then. Swain thought he and the sergeant would get on all right.

They had been watching the shimmer-

ing blue hills to the north for Indian smoke, but they hadn't seen anything since early morning. Now Sergeant Kirkpatrick spat a heavy stream of brown tobacco juice across his horse's neck and tugged his campaign hat down over one eye.

"It ain't like a batch of redsticks to let well enough alone," he said. He looked at Swain. "You make anything out of it?"

He made something out of it, and so did the sergeant, but neither wanted to admit it. They hadn't seen a sign since early morning, but Swain knew they were being watched. The Cheyennes had taken a beating back at Morrison's, as well as the cavalry, and they would have headed back to the hills for reinforcements. *If we can get to Carter's Wells,* the scout thought, *we'll have a chance. If we can rest the horses and men, and maybe get a hot feed in our bellies. . . .* But he had learned a long time ago that it didn't do to plan too far ahead in this country.

The morning passed and the scorching afternoon beat down on them, and Swain began to wonder if they might make it after all. There hadn't been any more signs, and the Wells lay only two hours, three hours at the most, ahead of them. And, behind him, he began to feel a change in the troopers. They started to show signs of life, roundly cursing the heat and the dust and Army life in general, and in the cavalry that was a healthy sign.

After an hour one of the riders in the advance guard came back and reported no trouble up ahead, and Martin Swain and the sergeant looked at each other and wondered if they dared get their hopes up yet. A little farther on they came to the base of a long slope, and on the other side of the slope, in a valley, would be Carter's Wells. The sergeant stood up in his stirrups and raised his hand for a halt.

Sergeant Wellington, Junior Sergeant in the outfit, rode up to the head of the column.

"Dismount the troop, Sergeant," Kirkpatrick said. "Breathe the horses for ten minutes, then bring the column up at a walk. Mr. Swain and myself are going forward."

Wellington started to salute, then realized that Kirkpatrick wasn't an officer and became confused. He settled for a brisk "Yes Sir!" pulled his horse around and bellowed, "D Troop, prepare to dismount. Hooo-o!"

SWAIN and the sergeant rode up the slight incline of the slope near the base, but, as the going got rougher, they got down and led their horses, saving what little strength the animals had for any trouble that might be coming. It took approximately thirty minutes to get to the top—and when they got there Martin Swain wished that they hadn't made it at all.

The two troopers of the advance guard were sprawled rag-doll fashion, one across the other, their sightless eyes staring wide in stark horror, their naked skulls gleaming bright crimson. For a wild moment Swain thought he was going to be sick—but he had seen it worse. At least these men were dead.

He heard Sergeant Kirkpatrick cursing, earnestly, monotonously, and it struck Swain that if he couldn't understand the Sergeant's words his cursing would have sounded more like praying. The scout's first thought was Cheyennes, but the closer he got to the bodies the worse it got. Their tongues were gone, and that wasn't all, and the ground was drenched in blood. Part of Geronimo's band must have thrown in with the Cheyenne, for this was the unmistakable work of the Apaches.

Even before Swain saw the smoke coming up from the valley below he had already guessed what had happened. The column had been watched all right, but only to make sure that they didn't reach the Wells before Apache made his raid. They must have had a lookout up here on the ridge and had ambushed the advance patrol the minute they reached the top. The two bodies were like pincushions pierced with arrows.

"And we can't even chase the devils!" Kirkpatrick grated between curses. "Our mounts are almost too tired to stand. They're just playin' with us, the. . ." Then the sergeant saw the smoke. The two men mounted silently, and from the crest of the ridge they looked down on what had once been Carter's Wells.

Swain rode down alone, ahead of the cavalry. It was all over now. Apache was gone—up in the hills probably, looking down on them, and laughing.

Carter's Wells had once been a cavalry outpost, but the outfit had been moved up north on the Gila. Now it was a way station for the Nogales stage, and a general store and meeting place for homesteaders foolish enough to try to settle in this country. Or that was what Carter's Wells had been. It wasn't much of anything now.

There had been a stockade fence around the place, but most of that was burned down now, and still burning. Inside the fence there was a brush arbor shed for the stage teams, and two corrals, and a deep well hacked out of pure limestone by no telling how many cavalry misfits and yardbirds. The shed was ashes now, and so were the corrals, and, without looking, Swain knew that the well had been polluted with coal oil and God knew what else. The adobe store building and dwelling had fared a little better, but not much. There was a stagecoach, too, still burning.

Apache must have made a clean sweep of things, Swain thought grimly, by attacking while the southbound stage was making its rest stop.

Then the scout heard the confused clatter of many hooves as Sergeant Kirkpatrick brought the cavalry down, and he thought of all the dime novels he had read and how the cavalry always came charging in with sabers drawn and guidons flying and bugles sounding, just in the knick of time. But they hadn't this time. Behind him he heard Kirkpatrick bellow, "Two's right into line! Trumpeter, sound the Halt!" And the trumpeter gave his brief, tinny interpretation of "Halt." There was no need of keeping trumpet silence now, but, to Martin Swain, a civilian, it all sounded rather ridiculous and unnecessary, the situation being what it was.

But the wise scout keeps his opinions of the Army to himself. Kirkpatrick turned the command over to Junior Sergeant Wellington, and Swain heard the solid clomp of cavalry boots come up behind him.

"They played hell, didn't they?" the sergeant said flatly. "Have you been inside?"

Swain shook his head. He knew what he would find inside, and he wasn't eager to look at it. He could see enough from where he stood, there in the driveway in front of the adobe building. Kirkpatrick nodded at a body sagging across a window sill.

"Is that old man Carter?"

Swain said, "I think so. I saw him once and he was about that size." Size was all there was to go by. "Are you going to keep the troop here tonight?" Swain asked.

"It's better than a desert bivouac if an attack comes, but I don't think it'll come tonight." The darkness was sacred to the Apache, and his gods forbade attack at night. "Anyway, the men are dead on their feet. And so are the animals, for

Sergeant Kirkpatrick

that matter. Did they spoil the well water?"

"What do you think?" the scout said dryly.

Sergeant Wellington had already sent out a firefighting detail, scooping up dust in their hands or hats or whatever they could find, and flinging it on the live flames. Another detail was selected to gather up the bodies—more than a dozen dead Indians were scattered about in the yard, but they attended first to the dead inside the store building. One man in that detail—a youngster by the name of Tobin, on his first mission—came out of the building and was sick on the doorstep, and the older troopers pretended not to notice. Most of them had been through it themselves.

Martin Swain, fondling his Henry rifle, watched the activity without actually seeing it. The hills to the north gained his attention and he wondered vaguely how many of the savages were up there, and how many would be there by tomorrow morning. If Apache and Cheyenne had thrown in together it probably meant that the attack would be led by Choko, one of Geronimo's bloodier lieutenants, since this was considered to be his favorite territory. And, if Choko was in command, Swain could guess pretty well what the procedure would be. The chieftain's scouts probably had been following them for days, perhaps weeks, and he would know, or could guess, that the troop was headed back to Huachuca to rejoin the regiment. It was a six day march, even with strong horses, and Choko wouldn't be in any hurry. He would snipe at the outriders and advance patrol and rear guards until he had the troop cut down, and then, around the third day of march, he would move in for the kill. The scout smiled grimly. He and Choko were old "friends." They understood each other.

There was a grind and crunch of wheels on rock as the escort wagons came down from the slope, and, lumbering into the yard, added to the confusion. Swain started to move over to the store building when a young, wide-eyed trooper came running up.

"Mr. Swain! Mr. Swain, for God's sakes they's some women back there!"

The scout stiffened. At first he thought the youngster had snapped, but then he saw that he was only excited. "Women!" he said again. "So help me God. One anyway. They's a blockhouse behind the store building and that's where she is. You can see her in the window, lookin' over a barrel of an Enfield, and Injuns stacked up like cordwood. But the damndest thing. I couldn't tell if she was livin' or dead."

CHAPTER II

APACHE KILLER

"TELL Sergeant Kirkpatrick," Swain said. "I'll go have a look."

"You can just see her face lookin' over the barrel of that Enfield," the trooper said again, as if he couldn't get over it.

"Tell the sergeant," Swain said again, patiently, and started running at an ungainly, horseman's lope back to the rear of the store building.

He hadn't taken much stock in the trooper's story, a man imagines he sees some funny things at times. But when he got to the rear it was like the trooper had said, except that there were only two dead savages. The building must have been a guardhouse when the cavalry outpost had been here. It was a squat, sturdy affair of adobe and cottonwood logs, and there was one small window about as high as a man's head. That was where the girl was.

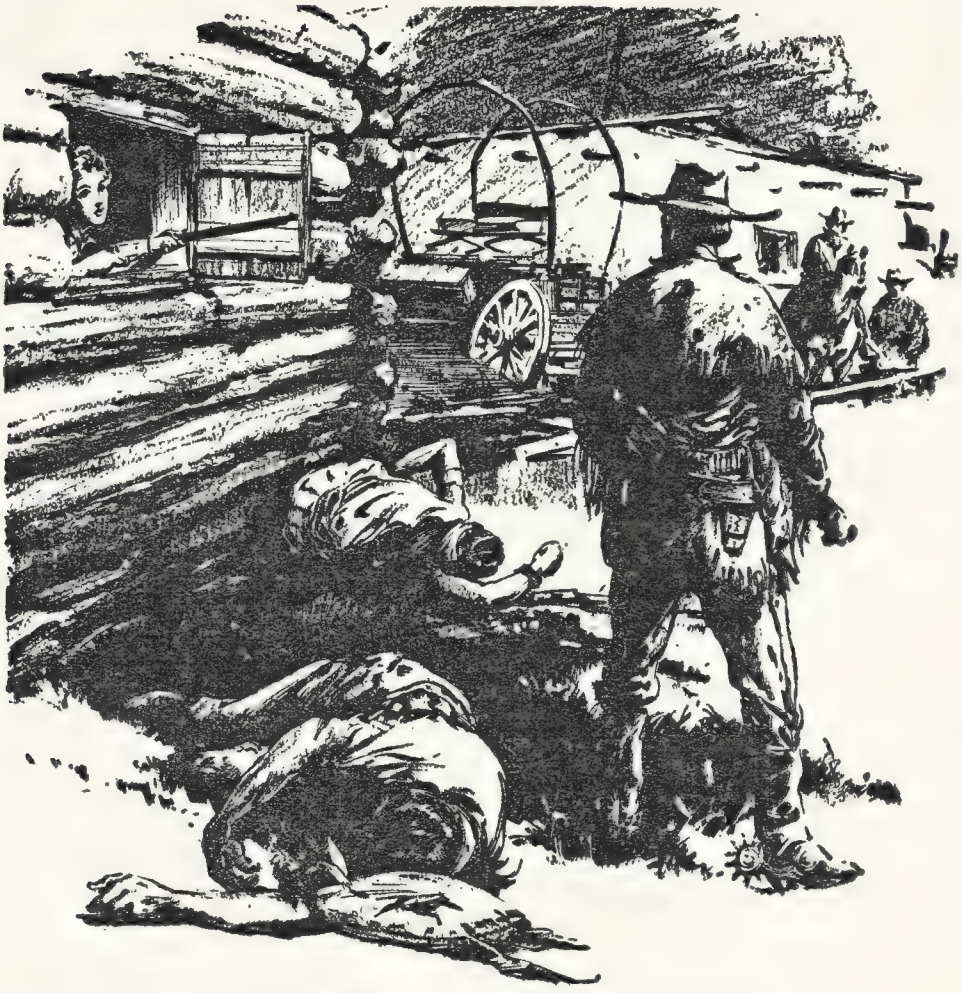
She wasn't dead, but Swain could see how the trooper might have got that impression. Her face was as pale as death and dumb with shock.

"Ma'am, are you all right?" Swain called. "Open the door and we'll get you out of there."

She only stared at him.

"Open the door!" Swain said again, sharply.

Her eyes wandered for a long moment, then, at last, focused on his face. She started, and Swain thought for a moment she was going to let go at his head with that long-barreled Enfield. She shook her head dumbly, as if not believing what she saw. Suddenly, her face disappeared from the window. And the door opened.



Swain thought for a moment she was going to let go at his head with that long-barreled Enfield.

She had gone through something that she would never get over completely, but she didn't go all to pieces, as Swain had expected, now that it was over. She stood there, shaking her head as if to clear it, still clutching that heavy Enfield. An ammunition box had been pulled up under the high window, and that was what she had stood on to do her shooting. The top part of her dress was half torn away baring one shoulder, but she didn't seem to notice.

Swain stepped into the small building, and, for the first time, he saw that the girl was not alone. There was the quick clack of boots on the hard ground and Sergeant Kirkpatrick came up behind him.

"Swain, I heard there was a woman back here somewhere!"

"Three of them."

"Joseph and Mary!" The sergeant came inside, looked first at the girl and then at the two other women huddled in the corner. They weren't hurt—none of them were—but the two in the corner were scared to death, clutching each other and sobbing convulsively. The sergeant shifted uncomfortably and turned back to the girl with the rifle.

"You sure played hell with Apache, ma'am," he grinned quickly. "Two of

them, by God! I guess that'll learn them."

Swain said, "Are you all right, ma'am?"

She nodded, visibly pulling herself together. "Yes," she said. "Thank you. But would you mind looking after the others?" looking at the sergeant.

It wasn't the sergeant's type of work, gentling women, but the doctor had been buried back at Morrison's Ranch, along with the lieutenant. He walked reluctantly over to the corner of the dark, dank-smelling room.

"See here," he said, "there's no use carryin' on that way. It's all over now."

They didn't even hear him, didn't know he was there. One of them was a heavy, buxom woman whose florid face was streaked with tears and dust and screwed up puckishly with sobbing. The other was young, about the same age of the Apache-killing girl. She was expensively dressed in rustling taffeta, and under ordinary conditions she might have been pretty. But now her face was puckered in an ugly way.

"See here . . ." the sergeant started again. And then they started to scream.

The sergeant knew what to do about that. He knew what to do to men, anyway, and one person was the same as the other now. He lifted a ham-sized hand and slapped them across the face. He brought the hand back, backhanding them quick, and the sound was like two sharp cracks of a whip.

The screaming stopped, but there was a sudden silence in the room that Swain didn't like. He turned to the girl beside him. "Wouldn't you like to come outside, ma'am?" he asked. And she nodded, seeming grateful for the chance to get out of the room.

They went outside and stood beside a charred spring wagon and the girl watched vacantly as the burial detail brought the bodies out of the store building and laid them in a silent row in the yard. He turned and faced the mountains to the north.

"Look this way for a while, ma'am," he said softly. "That won't be very pretty."

She did as he said, turning woodenly. She noticed that her dress was torn and tried dispassionately to pull it into place, but at last she gave up and let it hang again. Martin Swain noticed that a great bruise was beginning to come out on her shoulder—the bare shoulder that had absorbed the jarring recoil of the Enfield. The bruise seemed startlingly dark against the whiteness of her skin.

"We're a troop of cavalry coming down from Salt River," he said, trying to get her mind on other things. "We escorted a convoy up there a few weeks back. We're headed back to Huachuca now to rejoin the regiment."

She looked up at him then, and Swain felt that she was actually seeing him for the first time. "Thanks," she said after a moment, and her eyes gave the one word meaning. She had needed someone to talk to.

"I was on the Nogales stage," she said. "There were six of us, eight including the driver and guard, but I guess we're the only ones left. Me and the other two back there. The menfolks locked us in that little building and said maybe the savages wouldn't find us there. But they did. I don't know why they left without breaking in."

Swain smiled slightly. "Your shooting helped. And, too, they knew the cavalry was just on the other side of the ridge and they didn't have much time."

"But they'll be back," she said.

"What makes you say that?"

"Won't they?"

He looked at her face and those sober eyes and he couldn't lie to her. He could only say, "They won't be back tonight."

The sergeant came out of the block building hurriedly. He saw Swain and the girl and came over to them. "Sweet heaven!" he said, wiping his sweaty face. "Do you know who that woman is? The old one? The sow? She's the Huachuca commandant's wife! Her and her daughter was headed for Nogales and the Old Man was goin' to pick them up there and bring them to the fort. And I slapped them both! With the flat of my hand! Twice!" He wiped his face again. "I'll spend the rest of my days in the guardhouse—if I live to see a guardhouse. Which I won't. None of us will, it looks like—" He stopped abruptly, realizing that he was doing too much talking in front of the girl. "Swain, you want to come to the store building with me?" he said.

The scout looked curiously at Kirkpatrick. There was something on the big man's mind—something more than savages and guardhouses, for the sergeant had plenty of them.

Kirkpatrick said, "If you'll pardon us, Miss. . ."

"Coulter," the girl said. "Reba Coulter."

"If you'll pardon us, Miss Coulter, Mr. Swain and myself will go to the store building and fix a place for you—" he hesitated for just an instant— "for you, and the other ladies."

Reba Coulter looked at the sergeant and smiled slowly, wearily, as though there were some little private joke between them—but not a very funny one. She said, "Thank you, Sergeant."

Swain raised his hat and mumbled something—there was something disturbing about that smile of hers, and he suddenly became thick-tongued and awkward. "Perhaps I'll see you again this evening, Miss Coulter," he managed.

"Perhaps," she said, but her eyes didn't think so.

THE BURIAL detail had eight bodies laid out, covered with sheets, as Swain and the sergeant entered the building. The inside of the building was a shambles. Everything that could be broken was broken and what couldn't be broken had been carried away as loot. There were sticky-looking red pools on the floor, and some on the walls, but a detail had been put to work on that too before the ladies were brought in.

Swain said, "All right, Sergeant, let's have it."

Before answering, the sergeant went over to one side of the room where some suitcases had been slit with knives and the contents scattered over the floor. He went through them carefully, but whatever he was looking for, it was gone.

"Well," he said, "there it is. It's bad enough trying to take a column across the desert without three women on your hands. But when you have three women—and two of them are Colonel Ridgley's women. . ."

"Choco won't know they're Colonel Ridgley's women," Swain said.

The sergeant looked at him bleakly. "He will. The fat one—Mrs. Ridgley—had some letters from her husband here in one of her suitcases. They're not here now." And he added dryly, "Who do you guess got them?"

The words hit Swain like a kick in the groin, and he felt sick as he contemplated the future. Choko was nobody's fool. In his youth he had been a mission-school scholar, and so had many of his braves. There would be one brave sitting happily on Choko's right hand, Swain thought. The English-reading warrior who had thought to take those letters to his chieftain, when he might well have been rummaging for the worthless loot that Indians hold so valuable. For Choko would cheerfully sell his soul to the white man's devil to get his hands on Colonel Ridgley's wife and daughter!

The chieftain was well aware of the fraternal nature of senior Army officers. He could use the captives, if he had them, as a bargaining point in Washington, by working through the colonel. That failing, he could work on the colonel directly, decoying the main strength of Huachuca to the north and leaving Southern Arizona naked of protection. For all practical purposes, there was nothing Choko couldn't do if he had those two women. Or, looking at it more realistically, *when he got* the women, for, by now, the Apache boss would already be making his plans.

Sergeant Kirkpatrick's face hinted worry now, and those broad shoulders were beginning to feel the weight of responsibility that comes with being a troop commander. "Do you reckon Choko's really behind it?" he asked soberly.

The scout looked at him. "It's Choko, all right. Who else could bring Cheyenne and Apache together?"

Nobody, and they knew it. Then a corporal and five privates came into the store building, a detail to get a place ready for the women. Kirkpatrick and Swain went to the back of the building with them, to the part of the store that old man Carter had used as living space. There was only one big room. There was a kicked-over stove and a floor littered with dead coals and ashes, and a sturdy marble top dresser had been turned over and all the

drawers pulled out and their contents scattered. Apparently, the Apaches had been forced to do their house wrecking in a hurry, for they had missed the heavy brass bed in the corner of the room. They hadn't even slit the fat feathered mattress.

Kirkpatrick said, "Get this room cleaned out, Corporal. When you're finished, notify Mrs. Ridgley and Miss Ridgley that their quarters are in order."

"And Miss Coulter," Swain added.

Kirkpatrick looked at the corporal. "Mrs. Ridgley and Miss Ridgley," he said again. "And them only." He turned and walked back to the front of the building. Swain caught up with the big man, strangely irritated at the tone of the sergeant's voice. He said, "I had an idea that room was big enough for three women. They'll live under worse conditions before they get out of the desert."

The sergeant looked straight ahead. "The situation stinks loud enough as it is. I don't aim to make it worse by throwin' a fancy girl in with the ladies."

THE SCOUT was a slow man to catch fire, but the term "fancy girl" had suddenly and unreasonably set a flame of anger in his brain. "That's being pretty hard on a woman, Sergeant," he said coldly. "Unless you're sure."

Kirkpatrick said defensively, "It's written all over her. Look at that gaudy dress she wears, and the indecent way she exposed herself with menfolk around. She probably tore her dress herself, if the truth was known. And her lips. It wouldn't surprise me to learn there was paint on them."

Evidently, the sergeant had forgotten that he had referred to Mrs. Ridgley as "the sow." He had had time to think it over since then. After all, the Ridgley women were Army women, and the sergeant was nothing if not Army.

Swain said, "You've got sharper eyes than I have, Sergeant," which was the same as calling the sergeant a liar. "I didn't notice those things about Miss Coulter."

The sergeant had got in over his head. He and the scout had been friends for a long time, and he wanted to keep it that way, but at the same time he couldn't afford not to stand up for the colonel's wife—and he had plenty of standing up to do, to make up for that slapping. He said stiffly, "I'm goin' by what the colonel's wife said, and the word of a lady is good enough for me. She said Reba Coulter was run out of town up north somewhere, along the Gila I think. She knew because she lived up there and it was a scandal all over the country. She was a soldier's wife. Her husband was killed over in the Tonto country not so long ago."

The scout walked out.

Later, he returned and found a dark, dank-smelling room at the back of the building. It had been used to store the thousand and one pieces of stock that goes into a general merchandise place, among them a barrel of vinegar that had been split open by an Apache hatchet. The smell was almost unbearable, but Swain cleaned it up as well as he could because it was the only place in the building that offered any amount of privacy. When he had finished he had a trooper deliver the news to Reba Coulter that her room was ready.

By then it was almost dusk. He went outside and studied the smoky horizon to the north. He studied it carefully for a long while.

The men had small fires going along what was left of the stockade fence, preparing their first hot rations in three days. Swain got his own bacon, harbred and coffee and went over to one of the fires where troopers were waiting in line to cook. He smiled thinly as Kirkpatrick's striker walked across the yard with two cooked meals in his hands and entered the store building. After Swain had fried his bacon and heated his tin cup of coffee he drew another ration and stood in the cooking line again, eating as he waited to fix another.

Carrying the cooked bacon in one hand, between two slabs of harbred, and the cup of coffee in the other, the scout started toward the store building. He paused for a moment as he saw Sergeant Kirkpatrick squatting with his back to the fence, eating.

"I wouldn't send out any patrols tonight, Sergeant," he said.

The sergeant looked at him. "Why?"

That was one bad thing about scouting for the Army, somebody was always wanting to know the reason for things. And a lot of times there wasn't any reason, except for that vague intangible thing called hunch or intuition that most white men mistrusted blindly, and wild animals and Indians and some few white men, very few, staked their lives on. And a lot of times even the tangible things were ignored, or never seen.

He said, "There was Indian smoke to the north about thirty or forty minutes ago."

The sergeant was incredulous. "I didn't see it."

"It was there just the same."

The sergeant didn't argue. Scouts were hired to detect signs that other men would pass over. He chewed thoughtfully. "What do you think?"

"I think Choko's going to try for the women, and he's going to try like he's never tried for anything before. I also think it would be better if we pulled out as soon as it got dark."

"Tonight?"

The scout nodded.

"That's impossible. The men have got to have a chance to rest. And so have the animals."

The scout shrugged. "You asked me what I thought." He started to walk off, but the sergeant spoke again, worriedly.

"They'd pick us off one at a time on march. We wouldn't have a chance in a million."

"Maybe," Swain said, "unless Choko's gathering all his braves in the hills for one big push."

"Do you think that's what the smoke meant?"

"If I know Choko. He isn't going to spend his warriors on hit or miss skirmishes. He's going to wait until he's got a full force together and then engage the whole troop in a man-sized battle. It's the women he's after. And he knows the only way he'll get them is to kill every damned last bluebelly."

The sergeant took another bite of bacon and harbred. He chewed, and the longer he chewed the harder it seemed to go down.

"And I always wanted to command a troop of cavalry!" he said.

CHAPTER III

WAR MEDICINE

THE GIRL was in the almost-dark room that Swain had cleaned up, sitting cross-legged on some unburned pieces of quilts that he had found. She was resting her face in her hands and she didn't seem to hear the scout as he paused in the doorway.

He said, "You'd better eat some supper. Here's some harbred and bacon, compliments of the command."

She looked up then and smiled faintly. "I'll bet," she said. But she accepted the thick tough sandwich and bit into it, washing it down with the luke-warm coffee. He watched her eat, glad of the poor light and hoping that he didn't look as dirty and grimy as he felt. It wasn't often that he was bothered by vanity, for he was not a handsome man in any sense of the word. He was short, no taller than the girl, and built somewhat on the lines of a buffalo. Powerful, bulging shoulders and chest, with the lower torso tucking in sharply. His dress was haphazard, but, on Martin Swain, not colorful. He wore the broad-brimmed flat-crowned hat of a Nebraska cattleman, a soiled buckskin shirt, and Army issue pants whose original blue color was discernible only in spots and patches. When not actually scouting Indian-held territory he wore heavy brown leather boots with built-up heels, and spurs with fantastic sunburst rowels, near the size of a Mexican vaquero's. Spurs such as those would have meant certain and sudden death if worn in the vicinity of Apache, and perhaps that somehow explained the scout's fondness for them. But he didn't permit his whim to exceed the bounds of common sense—when he meant business he wore moccasins. And, thinking of business, he wondered what Sergeant Kirkpatrick was going to do about moving the troops. And, looking at Reba Coulter, he wondered how much right Mrs. Ridgley had to say the things she had.

The girl had finished eating now and was standing up. "I was hungry," she said, "though I didn't realize it. Please convey my thanks to the commandant

for the meal, and the room. It must have been a great deal of trouble."

The last was tinged with irony, but no bitterness. Swain felt his face warm.

"The sergeant thought. . ." he started. "The two other ladies being together. . . There being only one bedroom. . ." He bogged down completely.

"It doesn't matter," she said, and she smiled as she said it, to lessen his discomfort. The room was almost totally dark now, and the store building's adobe walls were naked and somehow dead, and pale sky showed through the burned-out places in the ceiling. Swain felt that he wanted to stay for a while and talk to the girl, but he didn't know what to say.

"I guess I'll get back now," he said finally.

He went outside and saw that the company wagons had been pulled around the stockade to fill in the burned-out places in the wall. Sentries had been posted, and a weary looking burial detail was coming in from the west end of the stockade. Swain wondered if they had buried the two troopers who had died up on the ridge. He decided that they had, because a body wouldn't keep long enough to take back to the fort.

Sergeant Kirkpatrick, who had been inspecting the horses on the long company picket line, saw Swain in front of the store building and came over. He said, "I want you to take a look around after a while, Swain. To the north especially. And in the hills."

"All right."

"To tell the God's truth, I don't know what to do. I don't know if it would be better to stay here or move out. I don't like moving a column in the dark, I know that. And them women."

"You're the commander," Swain said.

"And don't I damned well know it." The sergeant rubbed his big face. "You take a look around," he said again, "and let me know when you get back."

"Sure," Swain said. He watched the sergeant move off in the direction of the burned corrals, where most of the men had already bedded down, exhausted. The sergeant, Swain guessed, had been doing a lot of thinking in the past few hours. Maybe a little too much thinking. And the women. They were something the cavalry hadn't counted on.

Swain wandered aimlessly for a few minutes, too tired to sleep, and anyway knowing that he would have to move out before long. He walked down toward the end of the store building, toward the block house, and there he saw the figure of Reba Coulter sitting on the tongue of the charred wagon. She heard the silver sounds of Swain's spurs and looked up.

"I couldn't sleep," she said. "I came outside without permission. Do you think the cavalry will mind?"

"The cavalry's too tired to mind," Swain said. He leaned against the wagon and faced the north. The stockade was completely dark now, and strangely quiet and peaceful. There was only the swishing sound of the big cavalry horses along the picket line, and now and then a muted thud as one of the animals pawed the ground nervously with a shod hoof.

He felt her looking at him. "Don't you ever sleep?" she asked.

"I'll sleep after a while maybe. After I take a look at the hills."

"I used to wonder about Indian scouts," she said. "Why would a man take up that kind of work—is it the pay?"

"Some scouts get paid pretty well. It depends on what they're good at."

"Are you an expert at something?"

He looked at her for the first time. She was only a blurred figure in the darkness. "I'm supposed to be an expert on Choko," he said evenly. He turned the name over in his mind. "Choko . . . devil, and fox, and hyena, and maybe a little bit of a god. I've never seen him, but I've known him for a long time."

"From the way you say his name I can't tell if you hate him or admire him."

He had never thought of it that way, but maybe he did admire the savage chieftain in some ways—because he consistently thought two jumps ahead of the scout, because he had out-generaled and out-maneuvered the Army on every turn. But his driving force was hate. He said, "We had a ranch up north, several years ago. The ranch is still there, but the cattle are gone, and the house is burned down, and up on a hillside, below a thicket of chaparral, there are three graves where I buried my family after one of Choko's

raids." He said it flatly, without much emotion. Emotion had long since been spent, and a cold dogged hate had taken its place.

FOR A LONG moment Reba Coulter was silent. But at last she spoke, and her voice was bitter. "If hate is what it takes I guess I would be a scout, if I were a man. You've heard things about me, haven't you? Things that you didn't believe, because you don't like rumors and gossip, and—" she laughed harshly—"maybe because you're old-fashioned and still believe in the sanctity of womanhood. What you heard is true most of it anyway. But maybe you didn't hear it all."

Somehow, the scout hadn't expected to hear such bitterness. He shifted uneasily, not knowing what to say.

"I'm sorry," she said. "I didn't mean to bring that up."

He said, "It's all right. I don't mind."

"I know something about Indians. I know you've got enough troubles without listening to mine."

He said, "Sometimes it helps to talk about your troubles. I'm not much of a talker, but I can listen."

She stood up then, and, for a moment, he thought she would go back to the store building. But she didn't move.

"He was twenty-five when we married," she began, "and I was eighteen. That was two years ago. It seems like a thousand years, or yesterday; somehow time didn't mean anything after that. He'd just got his commission at the Point and was eager to come West because they told him chances of promotion were good out here. He didn't want me to come at first, but then my father died, and he was all the family I had—we lived in Kentucky, and after Lee's surrender he didn't seem to care much about anything; and then came what they called reconstruction and he didn't last long after that. And besides, we were too much in love to be separated.

"Soon we came out here and they stationed him up on the north Gila. It was strange country, and the officers wives were strange, and I don't think they liked me because I came from the South, and most of them were Northerners. But it wasn't so bad because we had each other. Then one day a detail came in from making a routine patrol, and they had him tied across the saddle. He was limp and dangling like a doll that had been slit open and all the sawdust had spilled out. He didn't look like anyone I had ever seen before.

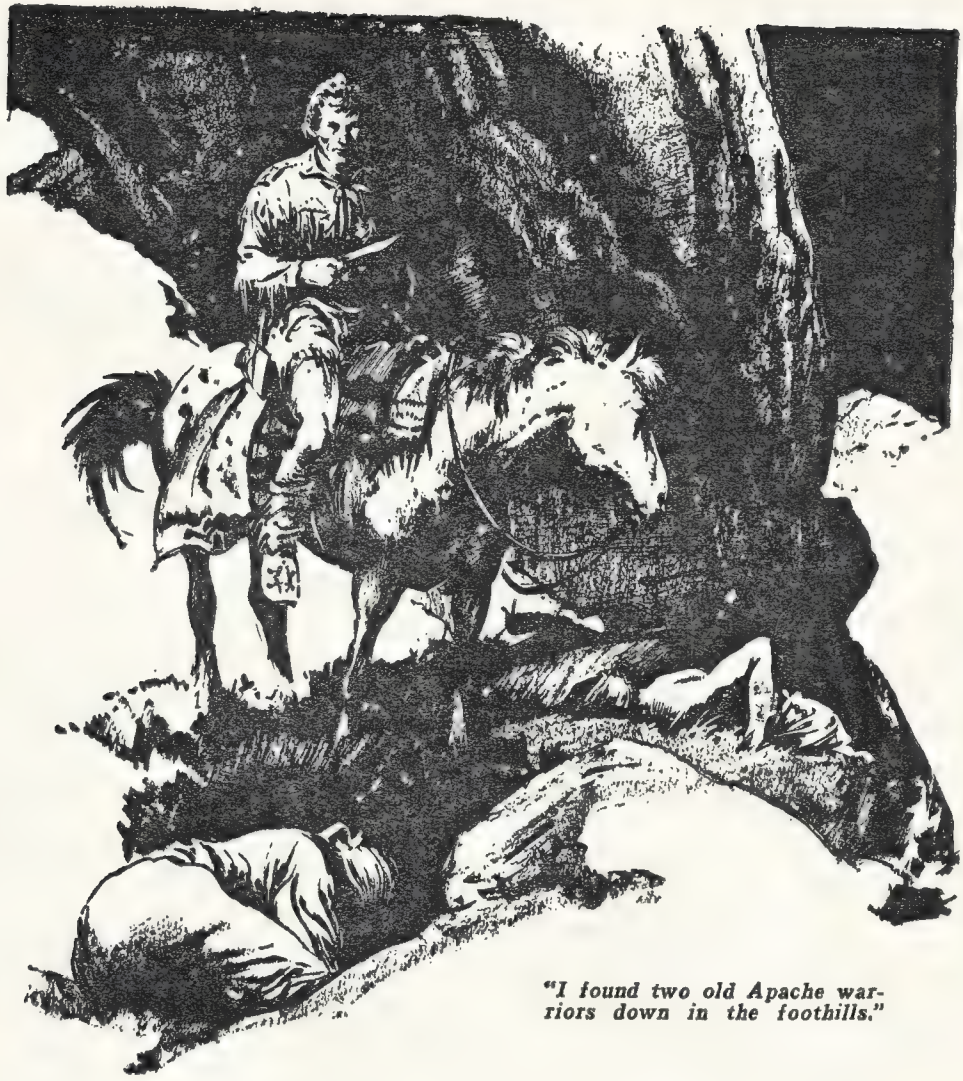
"Then ugly rumors started. They said he died with a cavalry carbine bullet in his back. They brought him back and buried him honorably, but that was to save the regiment's name. They made that plain enough. I got away as soon as I could, without thinking what I was going to do or where I was going to go. I made it as far north as the San Juan River, to a place called Herman's Crossing, when I ran out of money."

She paused for a long while. There was only the sound of the horses, and after a while a corporal went over to the corrals where the men were sleeping and woke some troopers up to relieve the guard. Swain wondered if she was through. He tried to think of something to say, but nothing he could think of sounded right in his mind. Then she went on.

"It wasn't much of a place. There were a few ranchers across the border in the Colorado country, and some down south, but the Crossing was mostly a place for hunters and traders and drifters. I'd had an idea that I could sell my jewelry—a ring and a brooch that he had given me—for enough money to get back East on. But they only laughed at me. Jewelry was only good for trading to the Indians, and glass was just as good as diamonds for that. I didn't know what to do, but a hungry stomach can make up your mind. I took the only job I could get. Working in a saloon."

Then she added flatly, "Maybe Mrs. Ridgley and her daughter are right. Maybe I'm not fit to be in the same room with them. I stopped thinking about it a long time ago."

Swain wanted to remind her that if it hadn't been for her Mrs. Ridgley and her daughter would be dead and their scalps would be flying on some Apache's spear. But, somehow, he couldn't get the words formed the way he wanted them. She turned suddenly, as if anxious to get



"I found two old Apache warriors down in the foothills."

away from him, and walked hurriedly, almost ran, toward the store building.

IT WAS ALMOST midnight when Swain returned from scouting the hills. He rode a sturdy little unshod Indian pony, using a blanket folded on the animal's back in place of a squeaking saddle. The scout had left his broad-brimmed hat behind, as well as his boots and spurs and repeating Henry. Now his weapons were a bowie knife, a hatchet, and, tied near the small of his back by a leather thong, a service revolver to be used only if a situation became desperate. He turned his pony over to the corporal of the guard and padded in moccasined feet over to the escort wagon.

The sergeant was sprawled out with his head on his saddle, but he sat upright suddenly as the scout approached.

"Well?" the sergeant said.

Swain sat down cross-legged and rubbed his eyes. "It looks like the hills are clean," he said. "I went north as far as seemed smart, then around a little to the west. Choko must have pulled his braves way to hell and gone up in the canyons to assemble."

"You didn't find anything?" Kirkpatrick asked.

"I found two old Apache warriors down in the foothills. Or rather they found me. They must have been put there to watch us because they were too old to be much good in a war party."

The sergeant didn't have to ask what had happened. There was a dark wet patch on the leg of the scout's pants, about the place a man would wipe his knife blade.

"And that's all?" Kirkpatrick said.

"That's all I saw. But I keep thinking about that smoke. If Choko's making war medicine he's being damn quiet about it—but you can bet your last ration of harbred he's making it. He's not going to pass up a couple of prizes like the Ridgley women."

The sergeant made worried sounds in the darkness. "God, if I just knew what to do."

"Do you want my advice?"

"I just want to know what to do."

"I'd move the column out as fast as I could get the animals saddled," Swain said. "There's a chance that those two lookouts were the only ones watching us, and Choko must have moved way back, maybe a day's ride, to assemble his party. Anyway, we can get a night's march on him. The closer we get to the fort the better our chances will be of help from the regiment."

The sergeant shook his head. "But maybe Choko hasn't pulled back. Maybe he's just waiting for us to pull some damn fool stunt like this and then snipe us away one at a time."

"Choko doesn't want to snipe," Swain said patiently. "He wants to get the whole damned column, and to do that he's got to have a lot more braves than he used on this raid today. An Indian, even Choko, is going to figure a lot of angles before he attacks a whole troop of cavalry."

The sergeant sat for a long minute. He still didn't know. Then, as if suddenly realizing that he was the commander, and a commander's job was to make decisions and make them fast, he stood up and called, "Corporal of the guard!"

Heavy cavalry boots pounded across the yard.

"Corporal, have the junior sergeant mount the troop immediately. We'll move out in ten minutes under trumpet silence. In columns of fours. I don't want to get strung clear across Arizona Territory, not in this darkness."

"Yes, sir," the corporal snapped, stopping a salute and leaving his hand awkwardly in front of him.

"And the women," the sergeant said. "Wake them up and load the bedding in the escort wagons. And don't take any nonsense. We pull out in ten minutes."

This time the corporal nodded, standing at attention.

"For the love of Mary, get to it!"

Inside the stockade the cavalry came to life, grumbling and cursing and spitting and coughing. Swain got his own pony, led it away from where the column was forming and saddled, making sure that his rifle was in the boot and plenty of ammunition in the pouches behind the cantle. He changed his moccasins for his high-heeled boots and spurs, and, beating some of the dust from his hat, he waited for the signal to march.

He heard boots come out of the store building on the double. Then the corporal's voice: "Missus Ridgley, Sergeant —she says to tell you she's goin' to report you to the colonel for movin' the column out at a time like this. She says she'll have you busted and locked up. She also says she can't get ready to travel in less than half an hour."

Then the sergeant's voice, angrily: "Go back in there and tell the old sow she can go to blazes! Tell her if she's not ready she gets loaded in her nightgown...! No, wait a minute, Corporal. You better not say that. Just ask Mrs. Ridgley if she'll hurry as quick as she can. That's all."

Martin Swain smiled in the darkness and wondered if he would ever understand the Army.

They moved out finally, about twenty minutes after march-time, with a light advance guard taking the lead and followed by a close connecting file that kept contact with the main body. It was the rear guard that Swain was mostly concerned with. He pulled his pony to one side and let the column pass him. The aching screech of the escort wagons made a noise that the scout imagined could be

heard all the way to Montana. It seemed impossible that a savage like Choko could miss the noise, if he was anywhere within a hundred miles of the march route. Swain knew it was ridiculous, and anyway it didn't make a lot of difference. When the time came, he knew Choko would be there.

CHAPTER IV

INDIAN SIGN

THE ESCORT wagons were sandwiched in between the main body and the heavy rear guard. Swain watched them go by, blurred crawling forms in the darkness, and once he heard the quarrelsome voice of the colonel's wife but he couldn't see any of the women. The night was black, as only desert nights can be at times. As the column moved on the scout fell in the drag, behind the rear guard, riding slack in his saddle but tense inside. He listened for things that ears couldn't hear.

By sunrise the column had made better than twenty miles. The scout checked with the rear guard, rode out on the flanks and checked with the outriders, then he went up to the head of the column to report to the sergeant.

"All men accounted for in the rear," he said, reining up beside Kirkpatrick. "How did it go up here?"

The sergeant nodded. "Black as the door of hell, and the colonel's wife complainin' she couldn't sleep. But no savages." He looked around at the flat bronze tinted desert. "Where do you reckon we are?"

Swain nodded toward a broken upheaval of land in the distance, deceptively quite and serene in the morning haze. "That's the Loveall Range. I'd say the fort's about a three-day march from there. How's the water supply?"

The sergeant shrugged. "Enough for about five days, I guess, if we take it easy. I figure we'd take a rest halt around noon and move out again when it gets cooler. You'd better get some sleep."

Swain nodded. He pulled out of march again and waited for the column to go past. The troopers slumped more asleep than awake in their saddles. The horses, he noted, looked better than they had the day before, but they still weren't in any shape to fight a running battle. Up ahead, the sergeant pulled out and watched part of the column go by, and it wasn't long before orders came down to dismount and lead the horses for a spell.

The scout fell in with the escort wagons when they came by. It wasn't just an accident that he cut in behind the wagon Reba Coulter was riding. The tailgate was down, and she was sitting there on a folded tarp, staring flatly out at the desert.

"Good morning," Swain touched his hat.

She smiled faintly. "Good morning. Doesn't the cavalry ever sleep?"

"We're taking a rest halt around noon to rest the horses," he said. "Probably about four hours. They'll get some sleep then."

"And you?"

He dismounted and walked behind the wagon, leading his pony. "Me too," he said. She motioned toward the tailgate and Swain felt his face coloring because he had been waiting for the invitation. But he vaulted up beside her, keeping his pony's reins in his hand.

"It won't be too bad," he said. "We ought to be at the fort in five days or less."

She looked at him, smiling that curious smile of hers. "But we won't, will we? Choko wants the Ridgley women, and he won't stop at anything to get them."

"How did you know that?" he asked sharply.

"I heard Mrs. Ridgley talking about the letters. But don't worry, I'm not going to tell anybody."

"Does Mrs. Ridgley know what it means?"

She shook her head. "What will they do to them?" she asked.

Swain sighed wearily and leaned against the slatted side of the wagon. "Nothing," he said. "Choko won't do anything—to them. He can use them as a decoy to draw the colonel's forces out. He can use them as a threat and as instruments for building tactical plans of war, but he wouldn't dare harm them. They are too valuable alive, and anyway he would be

afraid of Army retaliation if he actually harmed them."

But that wasn't all of it. Choko would handle the Ridgley women gently. But with a woman like Reba Coulter. . . The scout felt slightly sick when he thought of what would happen to her if the Apache got his hands on her.

He risked a quick glance at her face. She knew what he was thinking. He could see it in her eyes. But it didn't seem to bother her. She looked as though nothing would ever bother her again. He supposed that she was thinking of her husband who had died with the cavalry carbine bullet in his back; and maybe she was thinking of the shame of that, and of being a saloon girl, and that was the reason she didn't care much what happened to her.

She was leaning back against the wagon bed now, her eyes closed. Curiously, she asked, "Do you expect to come out of this alive, Mr. Swain?"

"I always expect to get out alive," he said.

" And Choko?"

"I'll get him some day. I know it. I think he knows it. I've come close before and some day I'll get him."

"And then you can rest," she said. "Then you can go back to your ranch and know that you've done all that can be done."

He started to tell her that the ranch was an empty place and he didn't think that he would ever go back. But he didn't. She seemed to be asleep. After a moment Swain dropped down from the wagon and walked out to the flank of the column, leading his pony. The sun was high, and broiling hot.

THEY HALTED for four hours, through the hottest part of the day, and the troopers found what shade they could and slept the sleep of the dead. Around four o'clock the column mounted and again began its crawling pace to the south. Swain, feeling better for the rest, rode again at the head of the column, keeping his eyes fixed on the distant hills in front of them and behind them.

Here there was no sign that day. No smoke, nothing to make the scout believe they were being watched. But he knew they were. He could tell it by the way his pony's ears pricked up every once in a while for no reason, and he looked out across the desert and saw nothing, but when he reached down and touched his pony's nose it was cold and dry from nervousness.

Sergeant Kirkpatrick said, "If we get through tonight without any trouble I'm goin' to send out runners to the fort."

Swain shook his head. "They'll never make it. Choko's having us watched again. And not by any crippled-up warriors too old for the war trail this time."

The sergeant jerked around to look at him. "Where are they?"

"In the ground, in the air, everywhere. You don't have to see them to know they're around."

The sergeant snorted. His confidence was coming back after the successful night march. "The runners go out," he said. "We'll have reinforcements on the way in less than forty-eight hours. Then let Choko try something."

Swain held his tongue. One thing a man learned by working with the Army, was patience. "All right," he said finally. "If you're determined, you'd better let me try it alone. I know this country. I'll have a better chance of getting through than any of your troopers."

The sergeant shook his head. "We'll need you here with the column." That ended it as far as the sergeant was concerned.

Late the next afternoon, as the column crawled wearily off the desert and into the foothills of the Lovealls, a trooper from the advance guard came riding back to make a report.

"We just found the two runners, Sergeant," he said flatly. "Two troopers anyway, so I guess it's them." His face was set in grim, tired lines, and only his eyes showed the fury inside him.

Swain saw the sergeant's confidence vanish, and his shoulders sagged as he again took the heavy load of responsibility.

"All right, Corporal," he said finally. "I'll ride up with you." He turned to the scout. "Swain, you'd better come along too."

They turned the command over to the

junior sergeant and Swain and Kirkpatrick followed the hard-eyed trooper up ahead, through the heavy underbrush of chaparral and mesquite, to where four other troopers were waiting.

As Swain looked, he imagined that the screams of the two runners were still floating over the hills; unheard, but still there, and bright with pain. They had been tortured methodically, leisurely. Apache hadn't been in any hurry on this job. The scout looked at the shapeless, swollen hands and saw that the fingernails had been pulled out slowly, one by one. A job like that took time. Swain looked up and saw the sergeant staring at him.

"If Choko didn't know all about us before, he does now," the scout said.

After a certain amount of torture a man will tell anything he knows, just for the privilege of dying. There was no reason to believe that the two runners had been different from other men. But their wide-open mouths, and their broken teeth, and their scalpless, bloody skulls proved that the Apache promise of quick death hadn't been kept.

The sergeant pulled his horse around. "We can't take them with us. We'll have to bury them up here," he rode, cursing back to the column.

THE hills were as hot and as dry as the desert. The only difference being that they were harder on the men and horses. And the night was even blacker, and the sergeant was forced to string the column out in two's because the trails were too narrow to hold more than that.

Leading their horses, Swain and the sergeant, struggled side by side up the steep black climb. Up ahead somewhere was the summit, but even Swain couldn't be sure in this blackness just where. But they ought to make it in two hours, three at the most, and then they would be headed down, on the last leg of their journey to the fort. A leg, the scout thought, that they would never make. Choko couldn't allow them to have another day for fear they might get some help from one of the fort's patrols. If he had got his attacking force together he would hit them tomorrow sometime, probably the first thing in the morning, since that was the Apache's favorite time for murder.

By morning, Swain calculated, they should be out of the hills and down on the flats again. And that was exactly the way Choko would have it figured. Carefully, the scout nourished the seed of an idea. And he wondered if the time that he had waited on for so long had come—the time when the Apache chieftain outsmarted himself with his own cleverness.

Anyway, he decided, there would be nothing to lose in looking into it. He started pulling his pony away from the column.

"Where the hell are you going?" the sergeant said.

"I'm going to take a look around. I'll meet you in a couple of hours or so on the summit. If I'm not there when you reach it, wait for me."

He moved toward the back of the column before the sergeant could offer an argument. Again he exchanged his boots and spurs for the moccasins, and flung his saddle into the back of a passing escort wagon. His rifle he handed up to the driver to keep for him.

He rode as far as he dared, circling back behind the column and cutting into the hills from the north and east. For perhaps thirty minutes he rode recklessly, for time was the prime element now, but when he felt his pony begin to shy nervously he knew it was time to go on foot. He picketed the animal in a gully and started making his way up a rugged slope. The place was strewn with huge boulders and wild with the smell of mesquite. And, except for a faint brush of wind, it was as still as death.

He lay for a moment, listening. He heard something that might have been the wind, but he didn't think so. An almost silent brushing sound. Maybe a loose tumbleweed bumping boulders. But not likely. He reached for his bowie knife and waited.

Perhaps ten minutes went by—a short wait by Indian standards. On occasion the scout had lain for as long as eight hours without moving, but the element of time hadn't been so important then. He began to inch forward, behind a clump of

needle-edged cholla until he reached a boulder. His progress had been slow and almost silent. But not silent enough. The sound up ahead was beginning to take shape. A quick, soft thud, as quiet as a sparrow's heartbeat, and then nothing. Behind some stand of chaparral, out there in the darkness, an Apache would be squatting, peering into the night.

Swain moved a little more, bringing himself to his knees, pressing as close to the boulder as he could. The quick brush of moccasined feet came forward again. Then Swain saw him, a frozen figure squatting startlingly close to the boulder. The scout held his knife against his thigh, and there in the darkness he seemed a part of the rock. The Indian came forward again, toward Swain. Suddenly, the dark body jerked upward, his scalping knife held ridiculously high as he plunged forward.

In the split second that the Indian framed himself against the paleness of the sky, the scout saw that he was not Apache, but, judging from his scalp lock, a Sioux. Swain slashed upward with his bowie, at the Indian's throat. A warm gushing over his hand told him that he had hit. He caught the body, slick and rancid-smelling, and lowered it to the ground. Almost instantly there was a second Indian rushing at him—there was always a second—with his arm flashing down to throw his hatchet. Swain dived to one side, heard the hatchet slam against the boulder and saw the resulting shower of sparks. He lunged upward, driving his bowie home again.

After it was over he leaned against the rock, breathing hard, the rancid, sour smell of the bodies almost making him sick. After he got his breath he started up the slope again, not so careful this time, because he doubted that the war party had placed more than two men at this point.

When he reached the crest of the ridge he paused and lay flat on the ground. The land below lay in almost total darkness, but it wasn't so important to see. His ears told him what he wanted to know. He closed his eyes and tried to see this ridge and the valley below him in relation to the column's march route. As near as he could judge, the flat lands ought to begin on the other side of the valley—just about the place the column ought to be by sunrise. He began to work his way down the slope.

THE column had reached the summit and had paused for a rest halt when the scout returned. He trotted his tired pony past the long line of resting cavalry and moved up to the head of the column where the sergeant was waiting.

"Well?" Kirkpatrick said impatiently.

"There're waiting for us, all right," Swain said. "Behind the ridge we have to pass to come into the flatlands. Apaches and Sioux and maybe Cheyennes. God knows how he got them all together. I don't know how many, but I'd say it was over a hundred. All I had to go on was the sound of their horses."

"Sweet heaven!" the sergeant groaned. "Sioux fighting with Apache! Are you sure?"

Swain looked at the stain on the sleeve of his buckskin shirt. "I'm sure," he said.

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The sergeant rubbed his face. "We can't take the column down in the flats then. Not if they're waiting for us. And we've got the women."

Swain said, "What else can you do? You can't sit here and go without water and get too weak to fight. Anyway, it would only give Choko time to bring more warriors together."

The sergeant shook his head worriedly. "I don't know. I just wish the captain was here. I don't mind fighting, but when you've got women on your hands, and your men and animals are dead beat . . ."

"If I guessed right as to their number," the scout said, "maybe we've got a chance. I know that ridge that Choko plans to attack from. It's got a lip about halfway down from the crest, and that's where he'll probably form his attacking force. If we could form a detail behind him, up on the crest, at least we could make him split his forces and fight on two fronts. And Choko knows as well as anybody that fighting up hill is no party."

The sergeant thought about it. He didn't care much for it.

"I figure the troop has one good battle left in it," Swain said quietly.

The sergeant thought hard, but he couldn't think of anything better. They weren't strong enough to run. They weren't strong enough to wait.

"What about the women?" he said. "And how are we going to pull a detail out of the column without Choko knowing about it? He's having us followed right now, if I know anything about Choko."

Swain said, "The women will have to take their chances. And this is the way I've got it figured. After this rest halt the column will pull out again as it would normally. But on march the detail would drop out, one at a time, behind boulders or brush or anything else they can find, and wait until the column is well past before it forms. We'll have to depend on darkness for cover, and hope that Choko's scouts keep following the column. After the column is well on its way toward the flats, the detail can form—I noticed a dry wash a while back that I think I can lead it through and make the ridge by sunrise."

The sergeant accepted the plan, but grudgingly. "If you guessed wrong on their number," he said, "we're sunk. Our holding force will be overrun before you could bring the detail down to attack. But . . ." he shrugged wearily, "I guess it's a chance we'll have to take."

CHAPTER V

BATTLE THUNDER

SHORTLY after midnight the column moved out again, and at the first chance Swain moved out of line and seemed to melt into the darkness beside the trail. He wore his hat and boots now, the only special notes of caution being the removal of his spurs. And his rifle had a solid, comforting feel in its boot under his left leg. After the screech and rattle of the cavalry had faded into the night, he dismounted and began making his way north again, toward a big spear-shaped rock—the assembly point for the detail.

It took almost two hours for the detail to form, the men arriving quietly in ones and two's, leading their mounts. Sergeant Wellington, who had charge of the detail, was the last to arrive.

"I guess this is it, Swain," Sergeant Wellington said, "fifteen-man detail, all accounted for."

Fifteen men. Putting them against a hundred or more savages, it didn't seem like much of a force. But Swain had learned long ago that a well trained cavalryman, drilled in the use of his weapons, was more than a match for two or three Indians. Anyway, the bulk of the troop would be at the bottom of the slope with Sergeant Kirkpatrick, and they would keep Choko's warriors busy for a while.

At the order of Mount, the fifteen troopers swung up to their saddles. Then, forming in a column of two's, they followed the scout into the hills . . .

It seemed to Swain that dawn was a long time coming. From his prone position on the ridge he could see nothing but blackness down below. But he could hear the restless scamper of many hooves down on the lip of the slope, and he knew that Choko had already moved his warriors into attacking position. Behind him, down in the gully where the detail waited, it was as silent as a grave.

Swain noticed the sky in the east begin to pale, and he readied himself for a phenomenon of this wild country that he had never quite gotten used to. One minute it was almost pitch dark, and the next minute a big bloody sun appeared over the edge of the horizon and it was light. He caught his breath as he looked down on the milling Indians below. Apaches and Sioux, and he guessed some Cheyennes, for he saw three chieftains standing away a little from the common braves, holding their ponies and standing like cold stone statues. They numbered more than a hundred. Closer to a hundred and fifty—a good sized party to bring together on short notice, even for a leader like Choko. Then Swain heard the muted clatter and rattle of marching cavalry, and the head of the column nosed out of the hills and came onto the flats.

He saw Apache scouts lying belly-down on the edge of the lip, watching the cavalry as it came into view, and he wondered what Choko would think if he knew his own back was being watched. Swain wormed down from the ridge and motioned for the detail to come up.

Sergeant Wellington headed the detail as they came out of the gully. The sergeant was leading Swain's pony, as well as his own big cavalry mount.

"We heard the column clear down there in the wash," he said. "I never knew before that the cavalry made such a hell of a racket."

The sergeant was a bearded, gaunt man in his late thirties. He came from Virginia, and it was said that he had been a major in the Confederate Army during the war. He left the horses with a corporal and crawled up the ridge to where the scout was.

"It looks like a convention of all the Indian nations in the Territory," he said, looking down. He bit off a piece of tobacco and chewed thoughtfully. "I wonder which one of them devils is Choko."

Swain said grimly, "So do I."

"Not many rifles," the sergeant observed. "I wish they'd use rifles more. I never saw an Indian that could shoot one worth a damn."

The entire column had come into view now, with Sergeant Kirkpatrick riding in the lead, staring straight ahead.

"Look out now," Wellington said, as one of the chieftains stepped back and gave a hand signal. Immediately the warriors scrambled down the side of the lip and swung up to their ponies. The chieftain gave another signal—*Choko,* Swain thought with cold hate—and the riders began mounting the embankment.

The column of cavalry halted abruptly as the first of the Indians appeared on the rise. Sergeant Kirkpatrick's voice bawled out, carrying with parade-ground clearness all the way to the crest where Wellington and Swain were watching.

"One thing about Kirkpatrick," Wellington said dryly, "he sure as hell can holler. There go the wagons. Goodbye, ladies."

The wagons had pulled quickly out of column, under small escort, and were moving back from the firing line. Then Kirkpatrick's voice bellowing again. "Companee-ee . . . Squads . . . Right into line!" And the corporal's voice echoing, "Squads right! . . . Squads right!" all the way down to the end of the column. Kirkpatrick wheeled his horse smartly and rode out front and center before the thin, wavering line of cavalry, then the trumpeter and guidon bearer cut out of line and took their places.

FOR a moment an eerie stillness lay cold on the morning. There was no sound from the cavalry, and the swarm of Indians sat their ponies like so many gilded images, their spears and rifles making a deadly thicket against the sky. Then, suddenly, a spine-chilling whoop that came all the way from the guts of some Apache split the morning wide open, and a great thunder of sound rose up as the savages poured down the steep slope.

Sergeant Wellington stood up and spat. "I guess we'd better get the back door open," he said.

The detail mounted in line formation, but they did not ride toward the ridge immediately. They waited until the whooping rose to screams, and, down below, they knew that Kirkpatrick would be giving orders to prepare to fire. And after a moment it came. A rolling volley of carbine fire. Then another one.

And the detail knew that the men would be loading, aiming, and firing with drilled precision, and from standing mounts. They could no longer hear Kirkpatrick's bellowing, but they heard the thin, piercing cavalry bugle rapping Charge.

Swain said, "It's up to your detail now, Sergeant."

"Forward!" Sergeant Wellington said. "Ho-oo!"

They rode up to the ridge and dipped down on the other side. The battle had closed now and in the confusion and dust and smoke it was impossible to see how it was going. The battleground was littered with brown, painted bodies, but that was to be expected. Warriors were always brought down on that first charge.

"At the gallop!" Wellington shouted.

They seemed to fly down the hillside now, the thin line of fifteen grim-faced men. They skirted the depression where Choko had hidden his braves, sliding into the battle on the oblique. When they got within a hundred yards of the fray, a group of startled Apaches spotted them and wheeled their ponies to charge.

The sergeant raised himself in his stirrups, signaling a quick halt. "I reckon we'd better shoot us some Indians!" he shouted to the scout. Then to the men, "Fire, dammit!"

Fifteen carbines spoke sharply, and dark gaps showed in the Apaches ranks. The gaps filled and the carbines rapped out again,

"Let's cash in these Government sabers!" Wellington yelled, shoving his carbine back in the boot and drawing his blade. And the detail moved in on the Apache flank.

The plan worked better than Swain had ever hoped for. It seemed to him that it was working a little too well—that they were drawing more than their due share of attention from the war party. Anyway, they were giving Kirkpatrick's men a breather. A big bronze painted buck bore in on the scout's right, brandishing a bloody hatchet. Swain snap shot from his hip and the buck faded away. He wheeled his pony and took a Sioux off a trooper's back, clubbing him in the face with the butt of his rifle. There wasn't time to make sure if the Indian was dead. He couldn't finish one job before his hands were full with another.

Part of Kirkpatrick's force had worked its way through to the detail now, and Swain glimpsed the big sergeant slashing like a man possessed, butting a bloody swath in the Indian ranks with the bloody edge of his saber. This was Kirkpatrick's kind of soldiering. Not thinking and making decisions. Fighting. Sergeant Wellington's wheeling mount flashed in front of Swain.

"Look at that Kirkpatrick!" he shouted, grinning. "Lucifer himself, in a blue coat!"

And at that moment the junior sergeant sat up very straight in his saddle, surprised, and a little shocked. He went down with a curious, bewildered look on his face, and the feathered tip of a Sioux arrow protruding from the base of his neck.

Swain felt an unreasonable anger at the junior sergeant's death, when there were so many others dying all around him. He saw the Sioux drop down from his running pony and race toward Wellington with a bloody scalping knife. The scout reached for his hatchet. He sent it hurtling over Wellington's body and heard the sickening smash. That's one Sioux, the scout thought angrily, that won't collect any more scalps!

He booted his Henry and drew his service revolver. Nothing was very clear after that. He fired and watched brown bodies go down. Gaps appeared in the blue ranks, but somehow they were filled. Occasionally he would see an Indian taking a trooper's scalp and be too busy to do anything about it, and he would direct his rage and anger at the first painted, grinning face he saw. Once he fell back to reload and saw Sergeant Kirkpatrick holding his pistol with his body against the horn of his saddle, trying to shove cartridges in it with his left hand. His right arm was hanging useless, an Apache arrow having gone all the way through his shoulder.

And a small band of Sioux broke through once and made a quick pass at the escort wagons, but Swain saw the guard beat them off. Automatically, the scout reloaded his revolver and moved back into the fight, back into the dust and smoke, where the sound of wounded

horses was even worse than the cries of wounded men. He fired as long as there was anything to fire at. But at last he realized that the Indians were gone.

For a few moments he was lost, with nothing to shoot at, with nothing to direct his anger at. Dust and black powder smoke lay heavy on the hillside, and an incredible number of dead and dying littered the battle ground. He heard a voice call, "Swain!"

HE LOOKED around and saw that it was the sergeant. A corporal was reined up beside the big man, holding him in the saddle. Swain pulled his pony around, and the animal stepped daintily, like a fine lady crossing a dusty street, in order to miss stepping on the dead and wounded. For an instant there was a gap in the cloud of dust and smoke, and he saw the last of the war party slip over the ridge.

"What do you think, Swain?" the sergeant said.

"I think you ought to get that arrow out of your shoulder and have it bandaged."

Kirkpatrick snorted. "Will they come back?"

The scout thought about it. He didn't feel like the authority on Indian warfare that he was supposed to be. He said, "God knows. Let's get the wounded back to the wagons. Then we'll see."

The troopers devised makeshift stretchers by using their long carbines and jackets, and they brought the badly wounded down to where the escort wagons were formed. The men who could walk walked. The dead and the Indians stayed on the hillside. A two man detail was given what the cavalry considered to be the worst job in the Army—that of putting bullets into the brains of the wounded horses. So, as the battered, ragged remains of D Troop made its way toward the flats, there lingered a spattering of pistol shots on the hillside.

Swain heard the high-pitched sobbing before he reached the wagons, but he paid little attention. He thought it was one of the wounded. He picketed his pony out a way from the hospital area —hospital without doctors, and without medicine to speak of—and found Sergeant Kirkpatrick leaning against a wagon wheel with the arrow still in his shoulder.

Swain took out his bowie and said, "Turn around."

The sergeant turned around and the scout clipped off the head of the shaft. He yelled, "Bandage!" and a trooper appeared with an armload of white bandage, some of it almost clean. Then he placed his left hand against the sergeant's shoulder, grasped the feathered tip of the arrow with the other, and jerked.

"Goddammit, Swain!" Kirkpatrick exploded.

Swain flung the shaft away and shouted, "Whiskey!" Presently someone handed him a bottle, and the sergeant shrank involuntarily as the scout splashed the fiery liquid on his wounds. Swain then cut the shirt away, pressed bandages to the shoulder and began to tie it up.

"Here, let me do that," a voice said.

Swain turned and saw that it was Reba Coulter. She had her sleeves pushed up and there was blood on her hands and

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on her dress—the blood of the wounded. She took the bandages out of the scout's hands and began quickly to bind the sergeant's shoulder.

"There's a man over there with a spear-head in his thigh," she said. "Mr. Swain, will you do what you can?"

"The women!" the sergeant said. "Love of Mary, I forgot about them!"

Reba finished the bandage and fashioned a sling for the sergeant's arm. "There's nothing you can do about them," she said. "The girl's all right. Mrs. Ridgley is dead."

The words were like faulty cannon shells. They hit flatly, lay quietly and unnoticed—then after a while they went off.

The sergeant jerked up, his face white. Then he went in a staggering run down the line of wagons. Swain remembered the high-pitched sobbing he had heard as he came down from the hillside. And now he knew that it had been the Ridgley girl.

"Will you help me with this man?" Reba Coulter asked quietly.

Swain came out of it. "I'm sorry," he said. And he followed the girl down the line of wounded and stopped beside a gray-faced trooper. He gave the man belt leather to bite on and said, "Just hold on, lad. We'll have you fixed up in a few minutes." And he went to work with his bowie.

Reba Coulter stayed beside him, her face almost as gray as the wounded man's. After it was over and they were putting the bandage on, Swain asked, "How did it happen?"

"When the small group of Indians made the pass at the wagons. A rifle ball went through her heart."

CHAPTER VI

A MESSAGE FROM CHOKO

WITHIN thirty minutes the cavalry was patched up again, the men having taken care of each other as best they could in the absence of a doctor. Swain found the sergeant at the company picket line, inspecting the horses from force of habit. The worry in his eyes had turned to grim bitterness, sharpened with extreme pain.

"Have you taken count?" Swain asked.

"Ten dead," the sergeant said flatly. "Twice that many wounded. Troopers Jones and Stoddard will be dead within an hour. There's not a man or horse fit to stand another skirmish." He turned his face toward the hills, as if looking for something to direct his anger on.

Swain studied the battleground. Now that the dust and smoke had cleared he saw Choko had lost heavily. Those trained volleys of Kirkpatrick's troopers and the surprise fire laid down by the detail had taken more than a score of savages. The hand to hand fighting, Swain guessed, had been about even. But even at that, counting the wounded, Choko would have his force cut in half.

"If they come back," the sergeant said, "we're done for."

"They won't come back right away," Swain said. "With half their attacking force gone Choko might have trouble keeping his hold on the Sioux and Cheyennes. They won't be eager to take another beating like that."

"They wouldn't worry about it," the sergeant said dryly, "if they could see us now. And the colonel's wife. There'll be hell if we ever get back to the fort."

If they got back. Swain watched Reba Coulter still working with the wounded, and he listened to the colonel's daughter carrying on and wished to God she would stop. It was beginning to wear on the thin-edged nerves of the troopers, and himself as well.

The sergeant was also watching Reba Coulter. He spat bitterly, and the scout knew what he was thinking. He was wishing that it had been Reba instead of the colonel's wife, if it had to happen to somebody. But Swain could only remember that the Ridgley women would have been dead two days ago if it hadn't been for Reba Coulter. And some troopers would be dead now, if she hadn't taken care of them.

The Army! Swain thought with bitterness of his own.

Later, the sergeant sent out a detail to bring in the dead. The total was twelve now, Troopers Jones and Stoddard having died in the meantime. Swain and Kirkpatrick stood in front of the company

area, watching, and the scout wondered what Choko would try next. It wouldn't be another attack right away, he was almost sure. The chieftain would try some other scheme first, and attempt to determine the cavalry's strength, more than likely.

He got his answer sooner than he had expected, for as the detail brought in the last of the dead an Indian appeared on the rise. He sat his horse there for a moment, framed sharply against the sky, and then he started down the slope toward the cavalry. A tattered white rag flew high on his spear shaft.

The sergeant stared at the Indian, then at Swain.

"He probably wants to see how bad we're hurt," the scout said. "But Choko may be cooking up a scheme of some kind too. If I were you, Sergeant, I'd make a show of strength for his benefit—and, if you can find one, put on an officer's jacket. Choko would like it if he knew all our officers were dead."

In five minutes Kirkpatrick had every man who could sit a horse mounted in company front across the area. The troopers had the dust beat from their jackets, their faces washed—they looked like garrison troops mounted for inspection . . . From a distance.

The scout smiled tightly. He only hoped that the Indian couldn't see the horrible exhaustion in their eyes, or the tight lines around their mouths caused by the pain of their wounds. Swain thought again, *The Army!* But this time without bitterness.

Swain and Kirkpatrick stood in front of the company, watching the Indian come toward them. The sergeant had taken his right arm out of the sling and it hung stiffly at his side. His boots had been rubbed and the dust beaten from his pants and jacket. On his shoulders two silver bars of a captain glinted in the bright morning sun.

"We'd better start toward him," Swain said. The two men marched out in quick measured steps to face the Indian about a hundred yards in front of the mounted cavalry.

He was an Apache warrior, Swain saw, mounted on a rugged little dappled pony, and he was completely naked except for a dirty breechcloth and wore moccasins. The warrior looked at Swain, ignoring the big man with the gleaming captain's bars on his shoulders. Swain kept his silence for a period of time, in the way of Apaches—then he spoke to the Indian in his own language.

"Choko has sent you to speak with the white soldiers?"

The Apache looked at Kirkpatrick for the first time, then at the mounted troopers in the distance. He nodded.

"What is Choko's message?"

THE thick white paint smeared around the Indian's mouth cracked in what might have been a dry smile. "The Great Warrior of the Apache has sent this message. The Indians of this land are weary of war. Too many brave young warriors have died, and the sands of the desert are glutted with their blood. Choko wants peace. He directs that white soldiers shall move across Apache land without fear of death. Choko's warriors will move into the hills, the hills beyond the hills, and there they will live in peace. That is the message of the Great Warrior."

"What's he saying?" Kirkpatrick asked.

"The usual pack of lies so far. Wait a minute." The scout turned back to the Apache. "Wise men know that peace is not given freely, but often it is bought with the blood of many men. What is Choko's price for this peace he offers?"

The white paint around the Indian's mouth cracked again.

"The two women," he said. "The women of the great white chief to the south." The Apache's eyes looked to either side of him and then to the wagons. Swain had an uneasy feeling that the Indian could see the badly wounded and dead that lay on the other side. "That," he stated flatly, "is the Great Warrior's price. If it is not offered, this land shall know again the pain of war and cry tears of blood. White man's blood."

"What is it now?" Kirkpatrick said.

"Choko wants the Ridgley women. If we turn them over, Choko says he'll let the column move on."

The sergeant stiffened. "Tell him to

go to hell! No, wait a minute. Tell him the women are dead. They've been killed."

"The women," Swain said, looking again at the Apache, "are dead. Your warriors killed them as they raided our wagons."

The Indian nodded soberly. "That fat one is dead," he said. "The Great Warrior feared it was so. But the young one, the offspring of the white chief, is not dead."

The scout turned wearily to Kirkpatrick. "Choko has already guessed that Mrs. Ridgley is dead. But he knows the daughter is still alive. There's one thing that the devil must have overlooked though—this Apache has only mentioned two women. I guess they don't know yet that we had three with us."

Abruptly, the warrior pulled his pony around and rode back toward the hill. About two hundred yards from the wagons he stopped again and turned to face them.

"He's giving us some time to talk it over," Swain said.

The sergeant about-faced sharply and started marching back to the wagons. "He can wait until he rots," he spat. "If Choko gets the Ridgley girl it'll be after he kills every last damned soldier in D Troop."

They went back into the assembly area. "Corporal," the sergeant called, "march the troop back behind the wagons and dismount them. Do what you can for the wounded." As the cavalry wheeled into squads and marched back, Kirkpatrick sat on a wagon tongue and held his face in his hands.

Swain only stood there. He wasn't running the Army, and even if he were he wouldn't know what to do now. He glanced over at the row of wounded on the ground, and Reba Coulter was still with them. After a moment she saw the scout watching her. She got up and came over to him.

"These men have to have medical attention as soon as possible," she said. "They'll die if they don't get it."

"They'll die anyway," Sergeant Kirkpatrick said harshly.

She looked at the sergeant, and then at Swain. "Choko wants the Ridgley girl, doesn't he? I thought that was it." She brushed an arm across her eyes, and Swain noticed for the first time that her eyes seemed much older than the rest of her. They were eyes that had seen too much and had been hurt too much, and they were incredibly tired.

She said, "Mr. Swain, will you tell Choko's messenger that Miss Ridgley will go with them."

The sergeant's head jerked up. "Swain, take that woman away from here!"

"I think," Reba Coulter said, "that I can wear Miss Ridgley's dresses. That should be enough to fool them for a while—until the column is well on the way to the fort."

Both men stared at her. In this country a woman didn't let herself be taken by Apaches—not alive. If a husband found it necessary to leave his wife alone in this country, there was always an unspoken understanding between them. In case of attack the last bullet in her gun would not be for the Indians. It would be for herself. It was a lesson they had learned the hard way, through great pain and sorrow.

Kirkpatrick said angrily, "Swain, the woman's crazy! Get her back to the wagon before her madness touches the rest of us!"

Reba Coulter turned on the sergeant now, her eyes sharp with anger of her own. "The wounded have got to be moved to the fort," she said coldly. "Your troopers are in no condition to fight. We'll all be dead if you try to stand off another attack."

"Soldiers sign up to die," Kirkpatrick answered.

"In battle, yes. With a reason. But they didn't sign up to die because their commander was too bull-headed to save them. And the Ridgley girl—you want to save her, don't you? Do you think you'll save her by sitting here and facing it out with Choko?"

The answer was too obvious to bother putting it into words. The sergeant said wearily, "Swain, are you going to take her away, or shall I call a trooper?"

The scout didn't move. For a moment he wondered if Kirkpatrick was right—if the girl was really crazy. But he didn't wonder long. The answer was in her eyes, there with the weariness and bitterness. She merely didn't care what hap-

pened to her any more. She was just tired.

She still faced the sergeant, but this time she spoke with a strange quietness. "Listen to me, Sergeant. Does it make any difference whether I die here or at some Indian camp? It doesn't to me."

Kirkpatrick looked at her, curiously now. "Why in God's name would you offer to do a thing like this? Don't you know what Choko would do to you when he found out you weren't the Ridgley girl?"

"I think Mr. Swain knows why I want to do it," she said. "He can tell you about it some time. As for what Choko would do to me—I've seen hells that Choko never dreamed of."

Swain knew now that the girl was thinking of her husband who had died running from the enemy, with a cavalry bullet in his back. Maybe, somehow, she thought that what she was offering to do would make up for that. Maybe it was some other reason, something that a man could not quite understand. Swain took her arm, and she tried to shake it off but he held to it.

He said, "We'd better go back to the wagon. There's no telling what'll happen pretty soon."

She looked at him sharply. "I meant what I said. Can't you make the sergeant see the sense in it?"

"I know you meant it," Swain said. "But you'd better go back now."

He saw the hopelessness in her eyes drown out everything else. She turned abruptly, breaking his grip on her arm, and walked quickly along the line of wagons.

"I'LL be damned," Kirkpatrick said wonderingly. "She really meant it, didn't she? She would take the Ridgley girl's place and turn herself over to Choko. And I thought I'd seen everything!"

Swain remembered that hopelessness in her eyes. "Yes," he said, "she meant it."

The sergeant rubbed his big face with both hands. His wound started to bleed again, the red staining and spreading on the almost-white bandages, but he didn't notice. He knew that Choko would not risk an attack with his weakened forces unless he had to. All he wanted now was the Ridgley girl. Would it be better to make a stand here and die "honorably" or should they save the Ridgley girl, and what was left of the troop, by letting Reba Coulter go through with her plan?

"If we only had a chance!" the sergeant said hoarsely.

But they didn't have a chance. Choko had beaten them on every turn. He was laughing at them now—laughing at Swain, because the scout was the best the white man had to offer, and he had failed to bring Choko in or defeat him.

Swain stared out across the flats where the Apache messenger was still waiting. Beyond the ridge somewhere, not far away, Choko would be patiently waiting for his answer. The scout was only glad that he didn't have the sergeant's decision to make, because Kirkpatrick couldn't win. On one hand he stood to lose the entire troop, along with the women. The only way he could save them was by doing the unsoldierly thing—that of turning a white girl over to the savages.

"If only we had more troops!" the sergeant said. "If there was only some way to trap the devil while he's weak!"

Something in the scout's mind snapped. He said, "Sergeant, what do you figure Choko would do if he got his hands on who he thought was the Ridgley girl?"

Kirkpatrick looked up, frowning. "Head for his home camp, back in the badlands, as fast as he could make it. He wouldn't be anxious to hang around until cavalry reinforcements could catch him."

Swain nodded. "That's what I figured he would do. And he would take the shortest way possible—straight across the Lovealls, through Dover's Canyon, and then into the mountains where no white man has ever been."

The sergeant's frown deepened. "You've got something on your mind, Swain?"

"Maybe I have," Swain said. He picked up a stick and scratched three wavering lines on the ground. "Here's the Loveall range. Behind that lies God knows what. Indian country. Choko's home grounds. Now say Choko was making for his home ground as fast as possible. Considering that his horses and warriors are almost as tired as the troopers, they aren't likely

to head straight up and over the mountains, but more likely they'll go through here . . ." He cut two of the wavering lines in half. "Through Dover's Canyon."

The scout threw the stick away and said soberly. "I know that ground. I've scouted it. I think I could find the canyon in the dark . . . if I had to."

It took the sergeant a moment to get the idea straight in his mind. And when he did get it straight, he didn't believe it. He said incredulously, "You mean turn the Coulter girl over to Choko—and then try to beat him to the canyon? It's impossible! For one thing our horses are almost too tired to stand, and the men too, what's left of them. And another thing, Choko'll make damn sure we don't follow him."

"It will take the right timing," Swain said. "If we turned the girl over now, Choko could make a half a day's march back into the hills, but he wouldn't have time to reach the canyon. I figure he'll stop at nightfall and make camp, and move on to the canyon tomorrow morn-

"This is loaded," he said. "Hide it on your person somewhere—in case something goes wrong."

ing. In the meantime we'll pull the column out and head toward the fort. We'll keep moving until dark, and I don't think Choko will have us watched after that. The rest of it will be up to Army guts and Army horses. We'll have to ride all night to make the canyon."

Kirkpatrick said dryly, "You're as crazy as the girl."

"Do you have a better plan, Sergeant?"

The sergeant was suddenly an old man. Old with worry and responsibility and pain. He stared at his hands for a long while. "All right," he said finally. "We'll try it. If the girl still wants to go through with it."

Swain found Reba Coulter in one of the escort wagons, tightening a bandage on a wounded trooper's leg. He waited until she had finished, and then said, "Miss Coulter?"

She looked at him flatly as he helped her down from the wagon. "Do you still want to go through with it?" he asked.

She nodded.

Swain took a deep breath and let it out slowly. He had never had much to do with women before. He hadn't known that there were women like this. Then he told her of the plan—as much as he knew of it himself. "The thing is," he said, "is to get to the canyon and ambush Choko there as he brings you through. You'll be in danger, but I'll instruct the sergeant to have the best marksmen cover you with fire. You'll have to make a run for it."

She said, "I understand," But her voice told him nothing.

He took a tiny, murderous little derringer from his shirt pocket. "This is loaded," he said. "Hide it on your person somewhere. In case something goes wrong—in case we don't make it to the canyon, or the ambush doesn't work."

"I know what to do with it," she said evenly.

Suddenly, the scout wanted to forget the whole thing. He wanted to stay here in the flats and let Choko attack and be damned. At least he could be with her here. That thought took an amazingly important place in his mind . . . just to be with her.

She said, "I'll change into one of Miss Ridgley's dresses right away. Tell the sergeant I'll do my best to look like a lady."

Then the scout knew a bitterness that he hadn't known since the day that Choko's band had raided the ranch. The feeling wasn't directed at the Army, nor at the sergeant, but at the multitude of intangible circumstances that had hurt this girl in ways she didn't deserve.

He said abruptly, "Miss Coulter, there's something I want to say . . ."

But, almost as if she had looked into his thoughts, she said, "Don't you think it had better wait until this is over?"

And he said, "Yes. I suppose it had."

CHAPTER VII

NIGHT RIDE

IT WAS a little past noon, as the sun beat mercilessly down, already bringing out the sweetish smell of death along the hillside, that Reba Coulter and Swain walked out on the flats toward the Apache messenger. The Indian brought his pony forward, reining up in front of them.

"The Great Warrior's wish has been honored," the warrior stated flatly.

"Only if I have Choko's word that the girl will not be harmed," Swain said in Apache, knowing that Choko's word was less than no word at all.

The Apache said, "The Great Warrior's word has been given. The girl is hostage and shall not be harmed."

Swain looked at her then, and he wanted to say so many things that the words somehow became jumbled and he could say nothing.

She glanced at him, and her eyes were strange. Then she looked away. "You're worried about me," she said. "But I can't be sorry for it. I suppose every girl needs someone to worry about her."

"It's more than that," Swain said.

She did not answer, except with her eyes, and Swain was not sure that he understood what her eyes were saying. He was not sure if he dared to understand. Then the Indian pulled his pony around and started back across the flats, with Reba Coulter walking behind.

Swain watched as they reached the base

of the hill, making their ways across the bloody battleground. The surefooted Indian pony took the slope in stride, and the girl had to run at times to keep up. They disappeared over the lip, but after a while they appeared again, the Apache riding slouched and heavy, not giving the girl so much as a backward glance. As they neared the crest of the ridge Swain saw the girl stumble and fall, but she picked herself up and clawed her way up the slope after the pony. Only then did Swain hear the cursing—like the cursing the sergeant had done when they found the two troopers dead and mutilated on the hill overlooking Carter's Wells—cursing that was almost the same as praying. The scout clamped his jaws together, hard, and the cursing stopped.

Within an hour the sergeant had the column on the march again. Kirkpatrick and Swain rode in the van, not looking at each other, not wanting to see what the other was thinking. They moved slowly, but not too slowly, because it had to look like a real march. Choko's warriors—God knew how many—were up on the ridge watching.

When they got out of sight of the ridge the sergeant called a rest halt and broke out half of the remaining forage and gave it to the horses. The horses—they were the main thing. Men came after horses in the cavalry.

"All right," the sergeant bellowed, "them that's hurt bad can ride in the escort wagons and lead their mounts."

Half the troop started to dismount.

"That don't mean every mother's son that happens to have a sore tokas. Just the bad ones."

Four gray-faced troopers dismounted and staggered to the wagons.

The rest of the cavalry walked—men stupid with fatigue and sick with wounds logged in the blazing sun to save their horses. And every step was taking them farther away from the canyon, farther to ride back if they wanted to stop Choko.

Then—when it seemed the day would never end, and all the world was desert and heat and endless walking—they stopped marching. And the sun lay red and bloated on the western horizon. Kirkpatrick called a dirty, red-eyed corporal up to the head of the column.

"Corporal, we'll make a short camp here. Issue double rations of bacon and harbred to the men, and feed the rest of the forage to the horses. Did we load any water at Carter's Wells?"

"We loaded some," the corporal said, "but it's not fit to drink."

"Break it out for the men to wash their faces in," Kirkpatrick said, "and their feet. They can build fires and boil coffee, if they have any coffee. Tell them to get all the rest they can. After they take care of their horses."

"All right," the corporal said. "Is that all?"

Kirkpatrick nodded wearily.

The sergeant turned his horse over to his striker—the striker he had inherited along with the command—and turned to Swain.

"Well, are they still following us?"

"I don't think so. They watched us from the hills, but I haven't seen any sign for the past hour or so. I'll go out after dark and see what I can find."

A quick succession of colors fell over the desert; yellow, orange, blood-red, and then blackness. Swain saw to his own pony, then built a small, wild-smelling fire from dried mesquite and chaparral and cooked his bacon. The night was pinpointed with the small fires, which was all right if they were being watched from a distance. The sergeant came over to the scout's fire. His face was gray-cast and tight from the pain in his shoulder. Swain wondered absently how the man could stay on his feet.

But that was in the back of his mind where thoughts flowed in and out without direction or purpose. With the front of his mind he thought of Reba Coulter and the things that could be happening to her. He thought of it, and the heavy smell of frying bacon became nauseating.

"When do you think we ought to pull out?" the sergeant said.

"Let the men get a little rest first. About nine o'clock would be about right I guess."

The sergeant fished out a big pocket turnip and studied it in the firelight. "That gives us two hours. The horses don't look so good. Stone bruises mostly. But maybe they'll be good enough."

"They'd better be," Swain said grimly.

THE scout allowed himself an hour's sleep. He made a short scout of the desert, and the sleep-drugged, exhausted men of D Troop were already forming when he got back. They moved their horses one and two at a time away from the picket line and stumbled out into the darkness away from the company area and the fires. The sergeant left the wagons and a four-trooper escort where they were, with orders to start moving toward the fort at dawn. In the meantime they were to keep the fires going and make the camp look as natural as possible to eyes that might be watching from the hills.

At nine o'clock sharp the column started moving—twenty-eight men and twenty-eight tired horses—all that was left of D Troop's combat element. And most of them, both horses and men, had wounds of one kind or another. Only the badly wounded and the Ridgley girl stayed behind with the wagons.

The column reached the foothills in about an hour, and by midnight they were well into the mountains. Three hours, that was about the edge they had on Choko, but the night riding would cut that down somewhat, and the extra distance they had to travel.

The night was black as only a desert night can be, and the thin pale slice of moon hanging high in the east seemed to give off no light at all. They stumbled over the rugged hill country, slashing through unseen clumps of cholla, and sometimes running headlong into the towering mescal plants. D Troop rode when it could, but at times when the going was too rough they walked, leading the horses. Hands were kept on the horses' nostrils at all times, ready to squeeze out any sudden unexpected sounds.

They stopped once after a hard climb to breathe the animals. The sergeant stood staring flatly into the darkness.

"I hope to God you know where we are," he said. "Because I sure as hell don't."

"I've been through here before," Swain said. "We'd better be moving."

But one hill was much like another, and even more so here in the darkness. It was possible for any man to get lost here, under these conditions. Even a trained scout. Swain forced the thought from his mind. Things were bad enough without making them worse with crazy notions.

They came onto the canyon suddenly, a great ragged tear in the land that, in the darkness, seemed as dimensionless as space. The sergeant passed the word back to halt the column. Swain said, "Hold on here while I take a look."

Swain scouted to the column's right until he found a narrow gap in the canyon wall. He stayed long enough to assure himself that he was not being watched, and then started making his way back to where the sergeant was waiting.

"About a hundred yards down," the scout said, "there's a gap in the wall where the men can squeeze through. The horses will have to stay over here."

The sergeant said, "All right, you take half the troop and station it on the other side. I'll keep half the men here. Then we'll wait. And see."

Swain said softly, "I guess that's it."

Kirkpatrick detailed three men as horseholders. "And for the love of Mary, keep them quiet!" Swain took twelve men and began squeezing his way through the gap, down to the canyon floor.

By the time the sky began to pale, D Troop was settled. Looking across the canyon, Swain could see the sergeant and his thirteen men lying on their bellies across their carbines. And down below, the canyon floor was beginning to take shape, boulders and rubble and flowering weeds developing in the darkness. Swain motioned to the corporal in command of the detail, and the bearded, red-eyed man came crawling over on his belly.

"When they show up," Swain said, "the sergeant wants Miss Coulter covered with fire. Heavy fire, until she can reach some kind of cover."

The corporal said, "All right. Say, have you got any chewin'?"

Swain found a raveled cigar in his shirt pocket. The corporal bit off half of it and pocketed the rest. "Thanks," he said. "I'll tell them." And he crawled away again, pausing behind rocks and boulders, speaking to the men.

Suddenly the chilled darkness of the night was gone, and a fiery sun reared angrily in the east and beat on the backs

of the cavalry. For a time Swain dwelled on the sickening thought that perhaps Choko had made a night ride, the same as the cavalry, and he had already passed the canyon. He strained his eyes, searching the canyon floor for sign, but it was too far away.

IT WAS then that all the things he knew about Reba Coulter converged on one point in his mind, and he saw the whole woman. She wasn't the woman Mrs. Ridgely had seen with her narrow, self-centered little mind—nor was she the incomplete woman that the sergeant's straightlaced Army mind had

Choko let out a blood-chilling screech that startled the warriors awake and sent them plummeting down from their ponies.

made her. Swain had known that before, but it had never been as sharp as it was now.

And he knew fear. Not for himself, but for her. But he wasn't fooling himself—Reba Coulter wasn't the "pure as driven snow" creature that the convention-bound and lonesome minds of soldiers and frontiersmen wanted their women to be. But she was hard and soft at the same time, and hot and cold. And Swain kept seeing her with that murderous old Enfield in her hands, and the bruise on her white shoulder, and the dead Apaches sprawled in front of the hot muzzle. He wondered what kind of special hells the proud milk-skinned Army wives had devised for the outcast—the young wife who had been foolish enough to marry a coward.

From many thoughts a single dominating thought emerged. He admitted to himself that he loved this good-bad hard-soft woman, Reba Coulter. And he admitted that there wouldn't be much point in anything—not even in outsmarting and killing Choko—if he never got to tell her that.

Then his thoughts became mingled with the far-away sound of many hooves, the solid plumping thud of unshod hooves of Indian ponies.

He felt himself tighten with suspense,

then he glanced quickly at the slack faces of troopers on either side of him, and he knew that they had heard it too. He rested on his elbows, peering down, his cocked Henry ready in the crook of his arm.

The sound got steadily closer, and up on the canyon rim there were small clicks as hammers came back on carbines. The scout had a strange mixture of feelings—anxious for action, but at the same time dreading what it might bring. Then, abruptly, around a bend in the canyon wall, the first Indian appeared.

A strange silence set off the morning. Even the thud of hooves seemed not to have the solid quality of sound. Swain darted a glance across the canyon to where Kirkpatrick was waiting. The plan was for the sergeant to give the signal when the Indian column was in full sight.

Swain dragged in a quick gulp of air as the head of the column came into view, old Choko himself riding in the van. Bitterly, the scout studied this man who was either god or devil, depending on whether you fought for him or against him. He was a small man, much smaller than Swain had imagined. His bony face was warty and streaked with red and yellow war paint. His toothless gums were pressed together, giving his brown Punch-like face an eternal scowl, and his great hooked nose flared like some wild animal's, almost touching his chin. The two other tribal chieftains rode to the right and to the left of the Apache leader, lagging a few inches behind—perhaps unconsciously, but giving Choko the undisputed position of honor.

The warriors that followed sagged heavily on their ponies, chins on chests and weary-looking. Choko alone rode with his head high, his dark little eyes darting this way and that, missing nothing.

And last of all, behind the old warriors and the wounded, was the girl. The scout clamped his jaws hard to keep from cursing aloud. There was a choking buckskin line around her throat on which an old warrior kept jerking angrily. She came running, stumbling, in the wake of the war party—in the choking dust and the stench of hot bodies. Her dress—the Ridgley girl's dress of fine crinolines—was nothing but rags and tatters now, from being pulled through thorn-daggered cholla and falling on sharp rocks. Bitterly, Swain wondered if Sergeant Kirkpatrick's sensibilities were outraged now by the way she exposed herself.

All the column was in view now and Swain waited tensely for the sergeant to give the signal to open fire. He caught the corporal's eye and made push-out motions with his hand, wanting him to move in Choko's direction as soon as the fight started. The corporal nodded, spat cigar juice on a flat rock, and sighted over the barrel of his carbine.

Abruptly, the signal came. But not from the sergeant. Choko suddenly spotted something, or maybe he only sensed that something was wrong. He let out a blood-chilling screech that startled the warriors awake and sent them plummeting down from their ponies and up the sides of the canyon. Almost immediately the troopers' carbines roared to life, and Swain glimpsed the Apache chieftain as he was literally lifted from his pony's back by the terrific impact of bullets. Every gun in the troop, Swain guessed wryly, had been trained on Choko despite orders to cover the girl.

The old warrior who had been holding the lead line scrambled down from his pony, dragging the girl toward the rocks. Swain's Henry crashed twice and the old man dropped to his knees. Reba Coulter broke away and ran toward the canyon wall, and the Indian's attempt to stop her with his hatchet ended with a carbine bullet in the face.

Swain began scrambling down the side of the canyon wall toward the girl. Up toward the head of the column he saw the troopers doing the same. The first volleys had been effective, but they were over now and the fight was closing to hand-to-hand.

Reba, Swain saw, had made it to a boulder at the base of the sheer drop, with the little derringer that he had given her in her hand. Above her he saw three Apaches who had made their way up the side of the wall. He yelled, trying to tell her that the Apaches were closing in on her, but she didn't hear. Swain turned loose from his hold on the cliff and dropped.

HE WENT sprawling, losing his Henry somewhere and grabbing for his knife. One of the Apaches saw him and grinned. He reached for his hatchet and brought his arm back to throw. But the scout's arm was faster. His long bowie streaked out, turning once in the air and plunging hilt-deep beneath the Apache's ribs. Swain retrieved his knife and leaped down to where the girl was standing, as the two remaining Indians came swarming in. "Get behind me!" Swain yelled. "Get cover behind the boulder!"

But instead she coolly stepped to one side and fired the derringer's one bullet into the first Apache's face. The Indian went down soddenly. Swain met the next one full on, and when the warrior missed with his first lunge the scout buried his bowie beneath the shoulder blade, driving it upward. The Apache died without making a sound.

Swain stepped back and leaned against the boulder, breathing hard. At last he realized that the noise had stopped. His ears missed the barking of carbines and the yells of the Indians. He turned around and looked up the canyon. The troopers were coming down the canyon walls now, carefully, their carbines at the ready. But the fight had gone out of the war party. They dropped their arms and stood in a sullen huddled group on the canyon floor.

Reba Coulter leaned against the boulder. "Is it over?" she asked at last. "Is it really over?"

"Yes," Swain said. "There's no fight in them now that Choko's dead."

Sergeant Kirkpatrick called from up above somewhere and wanted to know if they were all right, and Swain answered yes.

"You'd better sit down," he said to Reba. "You don't know yet how tired you really are."

She sat beside the boulder, numb with fatigue. "So he's finally dead," she said at last. "Maybe the killing and murder will be over now for a little while."

He said, "Yes, it's over now. This country will be safe to live in, and travel in, and people will have you to thank for it. We never would have got him if it hadn't been for you."

She smiled faintly. Then she spoke suddenly, as if the thought had been in her mind for a long while. "I suppose you will be going back to your ranch, won't you?"

Swain didn't know how to say what was in his mind. He wasn't any hand with pretty words, or fancy phrases.

He merely said, "Yes, I'll be going back to the ranch now . . . But I hope I won't be going alone."

From the way she looked up at him then, he guessed he'd said it all right.

Remember the Mother Hubbards?

SOME roads called them Camelbacks—those hard-coal burning engines with the cab set midway along the boiler. But Camelbacks or Mother Hubbards, they were something else again in the pungent language of the fireman who had to ride an unprotected deck behind the boiler backhead. For a lusty account of one Lehigh Valley tallowpot's air conditioned troubles don't miss Mother Hubbards and Muzzle Loaders, in the big October issue of RAILROAD, now on your newsstand, or send 35c to—

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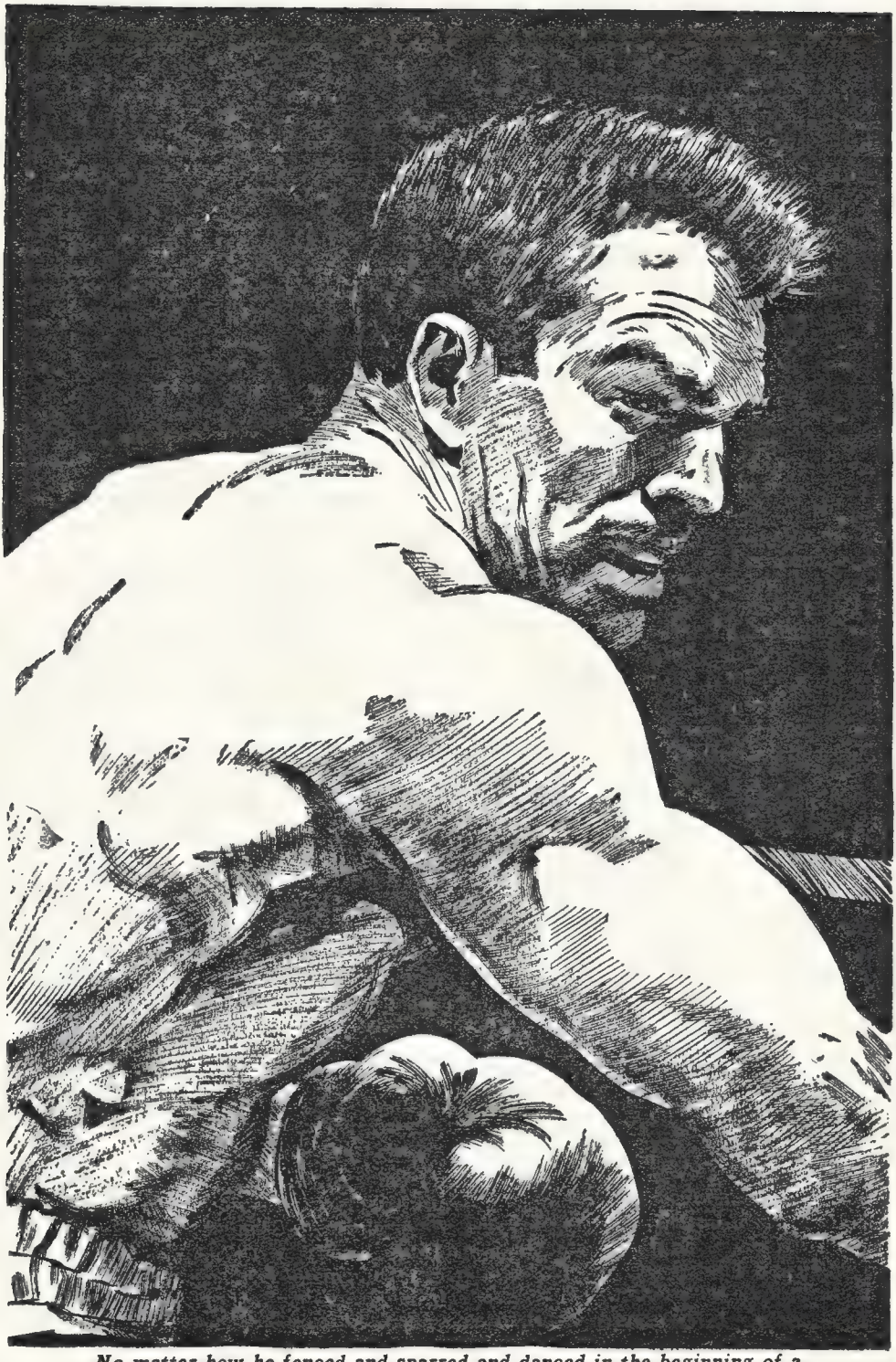


No matter how he fenced and sparred and danced in the beginning of a bout, everybody knew that sooner or later the lid would blow off.

ILLUSTRATED BY
MONROE EISENBERG

TOO EARLY TO TELL

By
JOHN D. MacDONALD

IT GOES back to Christmas Eve, 1948, to the night when Brownell, drowning some of his grief over the way the champ had spoiled Brownell's boy, Keno Morris, wandered into a Third Avenue gin mill and found Junior Franklin. That's when it started, Christmas Eve. And it ended last night. Or maybe it began last night. It is maybe a funny quirk that it should start on Christmas Eve and end in St. Nick's Arena, and on a million TV screens.

It's a good class. You have to give it that. Bob the Fitz fought in it. So did Tunney and Greb and Siki. So did Slapsey Max, and rough, willing Lesnevich. Keno Morris ran right up through the class until he hit the top man. And got spoiled. It happens that way. That last punch that leaves a bruise on the face, but also makes a deep hole in some hidden part of a man's spirit—and the juices run out.

Brownell saw it happen to his boy, saw it happen to Keno. Everybody saw it. Keno could have gotten up again. That squat chunky body wanted to get up. But the champ, chest heaving, lounged in the neutral corner, the lips spread around the guard in a superior and confident smile. Micky Brownell still thinks that it was partly that grin that kept Keno's pants pasted to the canvas until the ten count, and the boos. Those boos weren't exactly fair, because right up until that thirty-fourth second of the ninth round

Keno had carried the whole fight to the champ.

Micky says he pushed the door open and went into the steamy little gin mill shaking the big wet flakes off the collar of his top coat and swinging his hat to get the snow off that too. If you've ever met Micky, you know that he is not a one to be noticed at any time. He looks as if the hot summer of 1908 dried him up and no wind has ever gotten around to blowing him away. The hundred and sixty he pays for suits doesn't seem to help.

He smells the trouble the minute he is in there. It is at the far end of the bar, a kid maybe eighteen. For several generations Micky has been sizing up man-meat on the hoof. He saw the sloping shoulders of the power-hitter plus the lean-flanked grace of the speed boy. Then he looked at the face. One of those rich kid faces, Micky says. Brush cut, lean-cheeked, sneery-mouthed.

Loaded, the kid was. Swaying drunk. Pig drunk. He is making himself popular by telling Danny's regular patrons that they are a bunch of cattle because they've never read Sartre, have never heard of Bergson and his theories of aesthetics. Danny is wiping a glass and five of the lads, full of Christmas spirits, are moving in on the big-mouth kid.

Micky says the kid was so irritating that even though he'd only caught about fifty seconds of the spiel, he was almost willing to take a hand.

The kid finally gets the idea, shuts his mouth and turns his back to the bar. He slips one Sunday punch, blocks another, chops out with his own right and there are only four left. The fifth, suddenly in need of dental work, has slid under a table on his back. They move in on him, the four, and they mark him up, but he doesn't go down. By then Micky is watching with what he calls extreme interest. The kid renders another citizen *hors de combat* and by then Danny is getting weary of waiting. So from behind the bar he lays the sap delicately behind the kid's ear and he falls among the spittoons. The remaining three congratulate each other, each rest one foot on the kid and use him for a bar rail until Micky gets a cab and has Danny help him load the unconscious kid into it.

MICKEY finds me on Christmas afternoon. I sit across from him in the booth and I note the glazed look in his eyes. He recounts the events of the proceeding evening and then he says, "Get this, Lew. The kid's name is Harkness Willoughby Franklin, the Third. Three of them yet. Here is the pitch. When he is just small fry, his folks split up. The old man is killed in the war about seven years ago. Now the old lady is married again to somebody else and she has a flock of young kids. They live out in California and they seem to consider the kid a bad apple. They have him boxed up in this private school in Massachusetts. He wants to go out to California for the Christmas vacation. They say no and send him a check and tell him to have fun. He gets drunk right in the private school and gets tossed out the day before vacation starts. He is a bright kid and he is sore on the world."

"Adopt him," I said, a bit sourly.

"Wake up, Lew," he tells me. "The kid is a natural. A hundred seventy-one pounds. Natural coordination. I've been talking to him. He wants to fight."

I did a lot of talking, both to Junior Franklin and to Micky. It didn't do any good. He was one sour kid, believe me. Sour on the world and on himself. You know what he wanted? A million bucks. He had this picture in the back of his mind. They didn't want him in California. So he's going to drive up to their house in a convertible the size of a locomotive. The back end is going to be full of presents for the half-brothers and sisters. And he's going to spit in the step-father's eye.

Dempsey wanted a million too. He wanted it because he came off the tracks, out of the road camps, sick of stew cooked in a tomato can. But this Junior Franklin didn't want it any less badly than Dempsey wanted it.

I guess the old lady and the step-father got conscience qualms. A month later they show up at the Clarry. Mickey has gotten the kid a room next to mine. The kid and I have spent a long tough day at Wattermeyer's Gym. I say this for the kid, there was never any trouble about making him work out. You tell him to work on the heavy bag and you can go

away and come back an hour later and hear that chunk, chunk, chunk.

The kid and I are talking over the day in his room, talking about the match Micky has made for him over in Jersey that's coming up in three days, when there is a knock on the door. The kid opens it.

As soon as they come busting in, the woman, hugging him, squealing, "Harky, Oh Harky, darling," the plump guy standing over to one side fiddling with his hat, I try to eel by and leave them alone. But Junior grabs my shoulder and says, "Stay here, Lew."

I went over into the corner by the windows. It is tough to believe that the lady is old enough to have a kid as big as Junior. She is quite a dish and she carries herself as though she is pretty well convinced it is true. She had a spoiled twist to her mouth that doesn't go away when she starts to cry and plead, as she does immediately.

To everything the kid says no, and the situation gets pretty grim. The kid and the step-father are soon yelling at each other and the lady's tears are turned off like a faucet.

"If that's your decision . . ." she says coldly.

"It is," Junior says.

"Tom will send you your usual check every month, of course."

Though this Tom was standing right there, Junior says, "Tell him not to strain himself."

They leave in a hurry and I could see how they felt and somehow I hoped the kid couldn't see it. They put up a fuss, but in their eyes you could see that they were damn glad to have the kid off their hands. But I could see that probably Junior sensed it too. He sat on the bed, his face right on the verge of getting all screwed up like a little kid with a skinned knee.

"Damn both of them," he said in a husky whisper. It put a chill on the back of my neck because he didn't say it like a guy cussing. He sort of chanted it.

"Let's go eat!" I said, trying to sound cheery.

"I'll knock on your door in ten minutes," he said. I left him sitting there. The kid was really loused up inside. He was growing up too fast, I guess. It was nearer twenty minutes before he knocked. I could tell as soon as I looked at him that something had changed. In twenty minutes something had changed inside of him. He still had the rich-kid face, but all warmth had drained out of his eyes, leaving them older and colder than granite. I could smell the shape of it. This big yen about being a boxer had been a wild kid stunt. Underneath he wanted to be taken back into the fold. But then they showed him how it was. Now it was for real. Not a game any longer.

It showed up in Jersey. Micky couldn't go. Junior stood up at the whistle and I dropped off the apron of the ring and pulled the stool down. Junior shuffled his feet in the rosin, yanked on the top ropes and turned at the bell. The other kid was willing enough. Both of them were green. The other kid clipped Junior twice. Junior shook them off and stalked the other kid. He got him right over my head in the corner. First there were two green kids, and then all of a sudden there was just one scared kid. A few thousand years of civilization was peeled off Junior. Usually during a real mix-up, the crowd roars all the way through it. They started roaring as Junior caught the other kid with a left, right and left. But then, as the kid sagged and Junior hooked him back upright into the corner, not letting him fall, the roar dwindled off. The ref came trotting over, but not before Junior sledged the semi-conscious kid three more times.

As the ref pulled Junior back he hit the falling kid one more time.

There was a big sigh in the place as several hundred people exhaled slowly. Junior shook his head as though he didn't quite know where he was. Then he smiled down at me. It took them a long worried time to get the wobbly kid over onto his stool.

He was still as limp as a rag as they hustled him up the aisle.

On the way back on the train with our kit on the seat beside him, he didn't seem to want to talk. He had that look on his face. Beat down, jaded. A joe coming out of combat has that look. An emotional hangover. Too much women will give the same result.

A FEW DAYS later Keno Morris came to the Clarry with his kid sister. We took a table down in the grill for five. Micky, Junior, me, Keno and Shirley Morris. Junior was the only one Shirley didn't know, of course. Shirley is crisp. That type. Took a business school course after high school and at that time she'd been working for a year in an insurance office in Manhattan, taking the train back every night to East Orange where Keno still bunks in with his folks. Maybe there are a hundred and fifty thousand Shirley's in New York. Quick and trim. Dark suits. White collars and cuffs. But too many of them have the thin little lips that go with thin little lives. At fifty-five they'll still be drying nylons in hall bathrooms. The ones like Shirley are marking time. There the lips are warm, the eyes level but with a hint of laughter, no matter how brittle the conversation is. Girls made, in heart and body, to have kids and a man.

They were both cool about the introductions, Junior and Shirley, and from then on they ignored each other. But you could feel how it was with them, even then. It made for a funny kind of strain, made all of us talk too loud, laugh too loud.

Then Micky said, "How about it, Keno? You've had enough lay-off."

Keno grinned his slow grin. "That's why I brought Shirley along. Moral support. I want to quit, Mick. Hell, I know how much I owe you. You brought me right up to where I could knock on the door. But they wouldn't let me in. I didn't quite have it. I never will have it. I could go on with it, but it won't ever be like it was. It won't ever be fun again. I could get another shot in a year maybe. But I'll be thirty in a month. The legs are about to go."

There was a long silence. Mick sipped his coffee and put the cup back down. Keno and Shirley were watching him anxiously.

"How you fixed, Keno?" Mick asked quietly.

"Close to forty, with no taxes to come out of it. I've got my eye on a good drive-in, Mick,"

"Luck, Keno. I was going to sound you out about quitting. You get in a jam, I can maybe book you a couple of deals to help out."

Shirley leaned over and impulsively kissed Micky's dry cheek. The old goat blushed like a sub-deb. He said quickly, "Junior here is going to help build up the Brownell bankroll. Someday he's going to be as good as you were, Keno."

"Better," Junior said lazily. It was like a slap in the face. In the stunned silence he stood up, yawned and said, "Goodnight all. Nice to meet you and your sister, Morris."

"Where," said Shirley as soon as Junior was out of sight, "did you get that!"

Micky briefed her. "What's he got?" Keno asked.

"Everything," Micky said, and added softly, "I hope."

"But he's wrong inside," Shirley said. "He's wrong, Mick. I feel so sorry for him. He needs somebody, dreadfully."

Keno, still sore, said, "He needs a thump in the chops, Sis."

But Shirley didn't hear him. Her eyes were far away. And probably her heart too.

By June the string was up to nine. One boy managed to last until the sixth round before the fight was stopped. The name, Junior Franklin, began to get into the fine print in the sports columns. He was a killer, but unlike most killers, he was unpopular with the fans. The fight crowd could sense the contempt in him from the moment he came down the aisle. He didn't acknowledge either cheers or boos. He had a habit of staring distantly down into the ringside faces.

But no matter how he fenced and sparred and danced in the beginning of a bout, everybody knew that sooner or later the lid would blow off, and people held their breaths waiting for that moment. One old guy died of a heart attack during that fantastic third round of his fight with Sailor Duval, the round where Junior and the Sailor stood flatfooted in the center of the ring and traded right, left, right, left, right, left for endless eternal seconds until at last the Sailor faltered, moved slowly backward and dropped on his face at the ropes.

Junior changed physically. Hours of ducking, bobbing, weaving strengthened

the neck muscles. He went from a fifteen and a half collar to a seventeen. His square wrists thickened. His face was saved by the fact that he was devilishly hard to cut, and his nose had a wide strong bridge to begin with. Stripped down he was a beauty, with deceptive shoulder spread, lean legs, flat hard belly and symetric chest.

He was still willing to work, but I could sense the impatience building up in him. He wanted to be on top so badly that he hurt. And he started to needle Micky for bigger and more important matches. Micky kept saying, "When I think you're ready for 'em, Junior, I'll match you. You're coming along nice."

And Junior started staying out late. He was off the liquor, and he made up the rest by sleeping until noon. Anyway, there wasn't much Micky or I could do about it. Junior wouldn't answer any questions as to where he had been or what he had been doing. He seemed to grow more distant from us, more apart, as the months went by.

Then Keno came to town with fire in his eyes. He got to the point at once. "The society kid is running around with Shirley," Keno said huskily, "and I want it stopped."

"How did they get together?" Micky asked curiously.

Keno flushed and kicked at the rug. "Shirley phoned him."

"Then aren't you sort of working at this from the wrong end?" Micky asked mildly.

"She won't listen to me, or to the folks. I told her that guy's poison. She's been taking late trains, getting home one, two o'clock in the morning and then getting up at six thirty to get to town in time for work. It isn't good for her. She locks the door to her room and Mom says she hears her crying in there. The other night she didn't come home at all. It either stops, or I'm going to shoot a couple holes in your prize boy, Mick."

"Oh, fine!" Micky said wearily. He sent me in to wake up Junior. In ten minutes Junior joined us, his hair still wet from the shower, a robe belted around him.

He raised one eyebrow in a slightly nasty way as he saw Keno.

"You're going to stay to hell away from Shirley," Keno said immediately.

Junior yawned and sat down. "Interesting. Very interesting."

"I want an answer," Keno shouted.

Junior held up his hand and started tagging off points on his fingers. "A. Your sister is old enough to take care of herself. B. She asked me to take her out in the first place. C. We seem to enjoy each other's company. D. The big brother act is a little dated. It went over great in the gay nineties."

Keno stood over him, glaring down at him. "What are you doing keeping her out all night, huh?"

"Well *really*, Mr. Morris," Junior said lazily. Then he laughed. "Your sister is a very canny gal. She's good at picking winners, Keno. This time she seems to have picked one. She seems to have inherited all the intelligence in the family."

Keno picked him up out of the chair and Junior snapped his hands down over Keno's wrists. They stood motionless and the sweat came out on their faces. Keno's face was twisted with effort, but he couldn't break Junior's hold. Junior laughed again. Suddenly the fight drained out of Keno—right through the hole the champ had drilled in him. His shoulders drooped. Junior released his wrists.

Keno shuffled to the door and mumbled, "Better stay away from her, Franklin." The door shut gently behind him.

Micky walked over to Junior and hit him open-handed across the face. He said, "I've known Shirley since she had skinned knees and bubble gum, kid. I'll manage you and I'll book your fights, but I don't have to like you."

"Your privilege," Junior said calmly.

It was two weeks later that I ran into Shirley and she told me how one night they missed the last train, she and Junior, and then they had walked the rest of the night, had watched dawn come. Shirley and I had coffee together and there was a deep hurt in her level gray eyes as she said, "I can't reach him, Lew. I can't get to him. I'm an enemy, the same as everybody else. I think he likes being with me. But his guard is always up. Once somebody has been hurt badly enough, they never let that guard down for the rest of their lives. I . . . I love him, Lew."

"Is that smart?"

"Can anybody be smart about a thing like that. I'm a year older than he is. Sometimes I feel a hundred years older, and sometimes I feel as if he's much older than I. He's odd, Lew. So odd, and so bitter."

"What are you going to do?"

She shrugged. It was a curiously pathetic and helpless gesture. "Stick around, I guess. Maybe some day he'll drop the guard."

I told Micky about it. He cursed softly and said, "Why didn't the damn fool kid tell me they just missed the train?"

"Have you noticed?" I asked him. "Junior never explains or apologizes. I guess it's sort of a code with him. Is he still at you about Rastek?"

"Yeah. Every day. What do you think?"

"Maybe he could take him, Micky. Then, for Shirley's sake, I'd like to take Junior on the big swing. Midwest and the Coast, back along the Gulf."

"So I'll see George about a match with Rastek"

JUNIOR took Rastek, in forty-four seconds of round one. It never should have happened. George was sore as a boil. It bounced Junior from small print to sports page headlines. Junior just happened to nail Rastek solidly with the first punch thrown. Rastek's bicycle did him no good. Junior caught him and knocked him off it.

I took three boys with me on the big swing. Shirley saw us off at the station. Her eyes were shiny. Junior was very casual, almost elaborately casual.

That trip is in the records. It's no chore to look it up. The headlines followed us and grew bigger as we went along, as the string grew. We hadn't planned to fight him so much on the swing, but in some of those bouts he only worked a total of two hundred seconds. Twenty-one knockouts and three decisions. He pushed over some very good boys. Lambert, Smiley Brokaw, Stutson, Berntson, Cradey, Malloy, Crile, Bernstein.

Junior didn't get what you'd call cocky. It was always that contempt that had been there right from the beginning. The old eyes in the rich-kid face under the brush cut looked out on the world with bleakness, and when the moment came they would blaze with an animal wildness.

There is a type of female attracted to young boxers. They make their approach with all the subtlety of a daily double player shouldering his way to the betting window. But Junior wasn't having any. He brushed off the hangers-on.

A dozen times Mickey got me on the phone and yelled, "Can't you stop that dopey kid from telling the press he's ready for the champ? He's not ready. He won't be ready for another two years."

"He's eager, Mick."

"If the Champ wasn't a spoiler, I'd let him have his shot just to wise him up. But nobody has ever had the stomach to take two shots at the Champ. Put the lid on him, Lew."

"I can't. He wants the match."

The champion is no dope, and neither are his managers. They caught a few of Junior's bouts and they saw the shape of things to come. They decided that it would be poison to let the kid get too many bouts under his belt, to let get too much experience. The Champ was fairly certain he could put him away in his present stage of development. So he and his cohorts added their yammer to Junior's. By the time we got back to New York it seemed like everybody in the entire world was all decided that Junior would fight the champion as soon as possible—everybody except Micky and me.

So Micky brought out the projector and the films. "You want to fight the Champ, huh?" Micky asked.

"That would appear to be the general idea," Junior said loftily.

"Cut the lights, Lew," Micky directed.

The Champ is something. He's all chest and arms and squatty legs. No neck at all and a small head. The style borrows something from Henry Armstrong. Drive, drive, drive—every minute. Throw leather. But he's even harder to hit. The squatty little legs are solid rubber, and in he comes, bounce-bounce-slam, bounce-bounce-slam, bounce-bounce-slam. To the uninformed he would appear to be a slugger, pure and simple, with no class and no deception. But if you watch closely you see the foot feints, the classic blocking,

the quick pivot, the clever use of the ropes.

The last film was of the fight where Keno got it. The last whip-punch sent the mouthpiece spinning.

"Lights, Lew," Micky said. I turned them on. Junior sat, a bit paler than usual, and he licked his lips. "Now how do you like it?" Micky asked.

"I can take him all right," Junior said softly.

"And how would you go about doing that?" Micky asked.

"Run like hell for six rounds. The hell with the crowd. Spend six rounds going backward as fast as I can. Then start counter-punching him and hope some of the steam has gone out of his legs."

Mick paced the room in silence for a long time, his cigar canted up at an angle. Then he stood by the windows looking out. Without turning, he said, "Kid, if you'd said anything else—anything—I'd refuse to make the match for you. But now I think you got about a fifty to one chance of taking him. So I'm cashing in on you. They're so eager to get you quick that we'll get a break on the percentage. You're in shape. I'll try to rush it."

And he did rush it. He suckered them into taking Junior on last night. That was only three weeks and two days after we watched the movies.

JUNIOR was already almost right. The danger was that I might draw him too fine. So the workouts had to stay light. He saw Shirley every night after she got out of work, but he was always in bed by ten. He was more silent than ever. There weren't any laughs in him.

Four days ago I had another coffee with Shirley.

"He wants to win so badly," she said.

"So does the Champ, Shirley."

She made a face. "He keeps telling me I've hitched my wagon to the right star. I hate him when he says that."

"Don't have any fights with him before the go, Shirley."

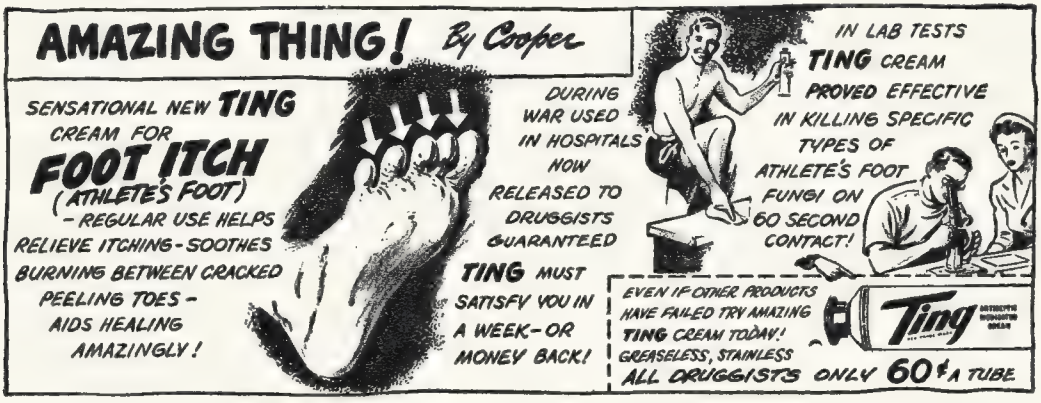
She drew herself up. "Don't talk nonsense, Lew. I'm Keno's sister. I know about fighters."

"Sorry, honey."

Maybe you caught it on TV last night. Or maybe you were there. You saw the end of the story. The way Junior came out and got on the bicycle. You heard how they booed him. The referee kept motioning for Junior to come on in and fight. You saw the number of times the Champ stopped and motioned to Junior to come on in and trade punches. Junior stayed out of the corners and kept moving fast, along the ropes. The Champ couldn't corner him.

A lot of people switched to another band on their sets. So they missed the seventh. Junior came out and he was still on his bicycle. Not one solid blow had been struck in the fight. And then after twenty seconds of running, Junior reversed. He took the Champ's right around the back of his neck and dropped home the prettiest straight right I have ever seen. It didn't travel over eight inches. The Champ's pants bounced off the floor and for once he lost his head and came up too fast. He still had fog in his brain. Junior dropped him on his face with a left and right.

Right then a lot of people learned some-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thing about champions. He got his hands under his chest at the count of four. At seven he got a knee under. At nine he came up, pulling that dazed squatty body off the floor through sheer will power. Instinct carried him through the rest of the round, brought him up after the two knockdowns that followed. And each time he came up he seemed a little stronger.

The crowd noise was one continuous high-pitched scream like nothing I ever heard before. It didn't let up between rounds. And that incredible man came bounding out for the eighth. Maybe Junior thought it was an act.

Junior tried to stand toe to toe with him. He missed twice for every blow he landed. The Champ didn't miss at all. Junior went down twice. He went down the third time and he was counted out as, with a smeared mask for a face, he was trying to use the ropes to pull himself back up onto legs that wouldn't hold him.

I had him on the stool when the Champ came over. Junior was just able to keep himself erect on the stool.

The Champ said, panting, "How goes it, kid?"

"It'll be warm in California for the Christmas vacation," Junior mumbled.

"What goes with him?" the Champ yelled over the crowd noise.

Junior saw him then. His eyes cleared. "You wouldn't stay down," he said accusingly.

"In my business, I can't afford to. Nice fight, kid."

We got him back to the dressing room. I cut the tape off his hands while Micky swabbed his face clean with a special tenderness.

The loser's dressing room is always a funeral. Some of the press boys come around for a little color. "How hard did he hit you, son?"

Micky chased them out. His cigar was out but he was still chomping on it. His voice shook a little as he said, "Nice, kid. A nice battle. Beat some of the kinks out of him, Lew."

"I'm through," Junior said dully. "I'm all done."

"I expected that, kid," Micky said. "Maybe the next good boy I get will let me bring him along the right way." Micky walked out.

Junior was almost asleep when Shirley came in. She went to his side and took his hand. He opened his eyes and gave her a startled look. I moved away from the table.

"You've got your cues wrong, honey," he said. His voice was harsh. "I didn't win. I lost."

"I watched it, dear."

He pulled his hand away. "There's no angle here, honey. I'm through fighting."

"Angle, angle," she said. "Can't you think of anything else? What do you think I am? What do you think most people are? Most people are just like you and just like me. Lonely a lot of the time. Afraid sometimes. Don't you know that you've got . . . you've got to have somebody to love? If you don't . . . you're alone. Always." Her voice grew uncertain. "Somebody who cares what happens to you."

She went down onto her knees then on the tile floor and as she is not a tall girl, her forehead came just high enough to rest against the padded edge of the rubbing table. Her shoulders shook, but she did not make a sound.

Junior came up onto one elbow. He reached his hand out and touched her hair. In his eyes was a great wonder.

I shut the door quietly behind me. I could hear the sounds of celebration from the Champ's room, echoing in the concrete corridor.

The crowd had gone, leaving a litter of gum wrappers, cigarette butts, the smell of smoke and sweat and perfume.

Micky was out by the car. He was leaning against it and he had relit the cigar. It glowed against the night.

We stood for a time in silence, as old friends can.

"He might come along O.K.," I said.

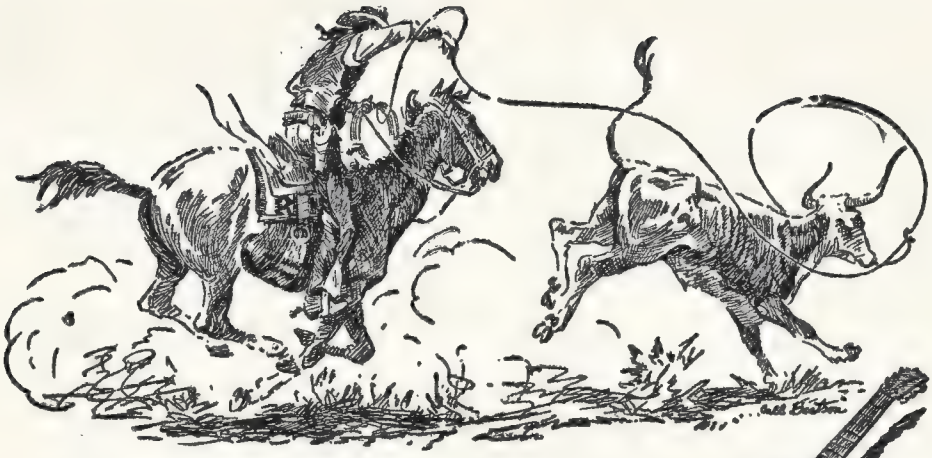
"Uh?" he said, around the cigar.

"Shirley's in there. Give him a few months. He'll fight again."

Micky thought that over. He took the cigar out of his mouth and spat a flake of tobacco from his lip. "I'd like that," he said. "I always told you he's a good boy."

We got in the car and went back to the hotel.

But that was only last night, and it's still too early to tell.



WESTERN—R.F.D.

By C. Wiles Hallock

I've buckarooed from Billings to the Border;
I've been and rode where all the ranges are;
I've broke and gentled hosses—and I've gentled sev'ral bosses;
I'm a dinger with a squeeze-box or guitar.
I'm one which favors ways of law and order,
But strong for callin' any bully's bluff;
I've l'arned from punchin' cattle that in life's bewilderin' battle
There's bidin' times and times for gittin' tough.

There's plenty grief in gen'ral buckarooin';
There's plenty work—and quite some pleasures, too.
Stray-trailin' is confusable. Calf-wranglin's plumb amusable.
Night-herdin' is a dismal chore to do.
It's fun to lope to town for pastime-brewin'—
The evenin' bunkhouse song-fests cheers the soul;
And chances for romances at the autumn roundup dances
Keeps a feller young and frisky, on the whole.

I've rammed from San Antone to Pokytella;
I've saddle-hiked from Naco to Cheyenne;
On open range and ranches, cowpoke art in all its branches
I've l'arned from steer and dogie—hoss and man.
I've got a gal in Gallup, name of Stella;
She's chaps-and-saddle loco—same as me . . .
I ain't no bunkum-breather, but I ain't plumb tongue-shy, neither;
I'm Western; jest wide-Western—R. F. D.!
Plain Western—and a Rambler First Degree!

DECORATIONS BY CULL BERTSON

Charley Hoe Handle's Bear Hunt

By JIM KJELGAARD

ILLUSTRATED BY PETER KUHLHOFF

Within a half second of each other, Charley touched off the right and left barrels.

CHARLEY HOE HANDLE, the slickest Injun poacher in Stick County, and prob'ly any other county, was walkin' up the Dargness Road when he heard a car behind him. Charley turned around. And as soon as he did he saw that the car was drove by Horse Jenkins, the Stick County warden.

Charley grinned to hisself. Only he knowed that, of all the wardens what had ever been on his trail, which was every warden what had ever been in Stick County, Horse had come the closest to puttin' him in jail. He was a mighty good warden, and Charley couldn't help likin' him.

The car pulled even with Charley, stopped, and Horse stuck his head out the window.

"Hi," says he. "Goin' my way?"

"Depends on where you're goin'," says Charley.

"Up to Nate Bodnet's," says Horse. "A bear has been killin' his sheep again."

"In that case," Charley says, "I am goin' your way."

Charley got in beside Horse and leaned back. He began to think. There was some no-account people in Stick County's cutover, but Nate Bodnet headed the list by a good hundred lengths. He was so mean that, rather than live with him any more, his wife had upped and died. His kids had lit out as soon as they was old enough, and not even a hungry dog would stay with Nate Bodnet.

He lived on a cutover farm where he kept sheep. They was scrubs, wild as deer, and so skinny Nate couldn't sell them to nobody at all. Bears killed the sheep some times, and the state paid Nate seven dollars and a half for every bear-killed sheep.

That was always perfectly all right with Nate.

CHARLEY AND Horse come to Nate's farm, and Nate hisself was waitin' in the door yard. He looked as though he hadn't ate for a couple of months and prob'ly he hadn't ate much; Nate was too lazy even to cook for hisself.

" 'Bout time you got here," says Nate.

"Yeah," says Horse, who didn't want no arguments. "How many did he get this time?"

"One," says Nate.

"Huh," Charley grins. "You must need a quick seven dollars an' a half. If you hadn't of reported so quick, he might of got half a dozen."

"I didn't ask your opinion," says Nate.

"But you got it," says Charley, "an' if you get any fresher you will also get a fist full of knuckles in the mouth."

"Cut it out, you two," says Horse. "Did you find the sheep, Nate?"

"Sure I found it," says Nate. "What do you think I been doin'?"

"Well, take us to it."

Horse opened the trunk of his car, took out two bear traps, and carried one on each shoulder. Nate led off through the brush and up a little hill. Maybe a half mile from his house, he led Charley and Horse to what was left of the sheep. In a aspen grove it was, near a big pine, and there couldn't be no doubt that a bear had killed it and drug it there.

Horse Jenkins set his traps, and he done a good job of it. Then they all went back to Nate's house.

"See you tomorrow, Nate," says the warden as they drove away.

Charley Hoe Handle didn't say much as he and Horse drove back down the Dargness Road. He didn't talk at all until they had went maybe a mile.

Then he says, all of a sudden, "Why'd you do it, Horse?"

"Do what?"

"Should I draw you a picture?" says Charley. "You know dang well Nate keeps them sheep around just in the hope that a bear will kill some. For every one a bear ketches, Nate gets seven dollars and a half."

"I don't know nothin' of the kind," says Horse. "All I know is that it is my job to kill sheep-raidin' bears."

"Leave me off here," says Charley.

He was feelin' kind of glum when he walked to his fishin' shanty at Clear Lake. Not that he had any soft spot for bears. He'd killed plenty in his life time. Only he'd always got 'em with a rifle and after he'd hunted. Charley went into his shanty, lay down on his couch, and started to think. The more he thunk, the glummer he got.

Bears in general could be hunted, but *this* bear was sort of special. It had come sheep-raidin' only because it was hungry and didn't know where else to get a meal. Charley sort of licked his lips. He hisself busted game and fish laws whenever he felt like it, but the woods and waters was the only meal ticket he'd ever knowed. If he didn't take what he needed when he needed it, he wouldn't know how else to live. Charley figgered he knowed just about how that bear felt.

After he'd figgered that much out he stopped bein' sad and started to get mad. Horse Jenkins knowed as well as Charley that Nate Bodnet kept them sheep around only as bait for bears. Only Horse was a game warden inside and out. He done

what the law says he should, and if the law says he should pay Nate Bodnet seven dollars and a half for every bear killed sheep, then Nate would get it.

There was still no reason why a good, self-respectin' bear should spend the night in a trap and be shot tomorrow mornin' just on account of Nate Bodnet.

WHEN THE moon rose up that night Charley Hoe Handle was behind the big pine tree what grew near the traps. He held his double-barreled shotgun, loaded with number seven and a half shot, against the trunk so the moon wouldn't glance off it.

Charley had everything figgered out. Seven and a half shot wouldn't kill anything 'cept maybe a woodcock or pat'tidge at the distance Charley aimed to shoot, but it sure would sting anything else so hard that he would think he had stepped into a nest of red-hot hornets. When the bear come back to get the half-et sheep, as he was sure to do, Charley would let him have both barrels. Then, if Charley was any judge of bears, this one would tear into the cutover and if he lived to be ninety years old he would never again think of comin' near a sheep.

It was maybe eleven o'clock when Charley saw a shadow in the moonlight, somethin' that didn't quite belong there. Soft as a kitten playin' with a ball of yarn, Charley eased his shotgun around the tree trunk. Only, when the bear got in the right place, Charley didn't shoot. He waited a second, tryin' to figger out what the bear aimed to do.

He nosed near to one trap, and there was a *snap* as the big trap sprung. Charley still held his fire; it took a mighty smart bear to spring traps without gettin' caught. The bear sort of bent over, with his hind-end towards Charley, and Charley heard the other trap spring.

Then, with a half second of each other, Charley touched off the right and left barrels. The bear gave a screech what must of been heard halfway to Beaver Junction, landed ten feet out in the brush, an' kept goin'. Charley could hear brush rattle for maybe twenty seconds or more.

Charley Hoe Handle wore a real wide grin when he came out from behind his tree. Moonlight's sort of tricky, but a bear's the only thing what should have been visitin' those traps so late at night. Of course it went without sayin' that Nate wouldn't be likely to say nothin' about such ideas. The law on that subject was quite plain.

"Whoever interferes with, or in any way obstructs, traps set by any conservation official, for any predatory animal, shall be subject to a fine of not less than one hundred dollars."

- **Who bade him live when he lay in the half-world between life and death?**
- **Who taught him the mad ecstasy of murder?**
- **Who held out her arms to him and offered . . . the kiss of death?**
- **Who but—**

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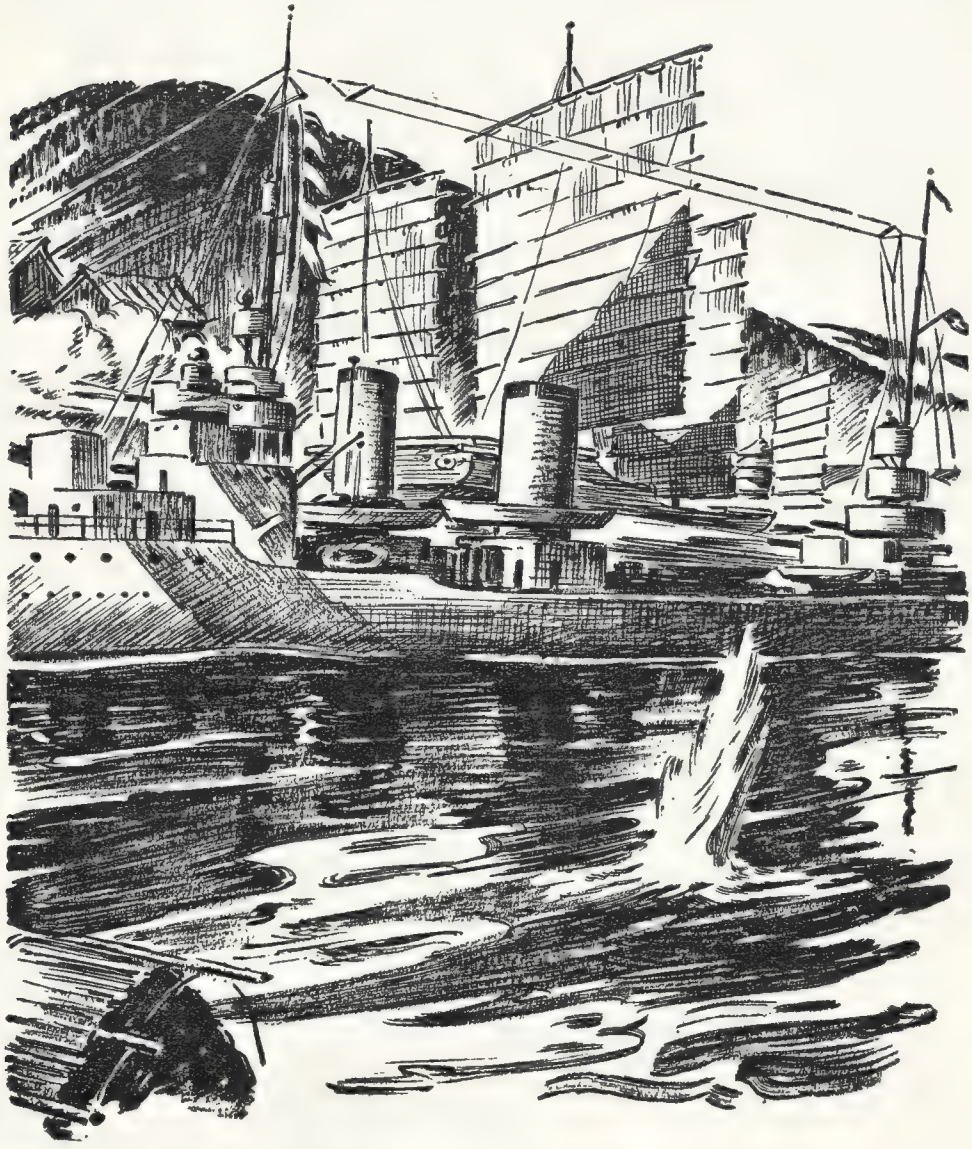
SHOW OF FORCE

The destroyer burst into an angry welter of flame and smoke as all its guns let go simultaneously.

By DURAND KIEFER

THE commodore's eyes, which were normally as deep blue as the open ocean, had a way of lightening and taking on the greenish cast of shoal water when his temper rose, which was not infrequently. The commodore was widely known as a man of temper.

His eyes reflected the green of shoal water now as they swept the jungle that crowded upon his ships from both banks of the dirty brown river. The jungle, felt the commodore, was no place for destroyers. He loathed it, with a seaman's loathing for the close, the untidy, the confining. The river stank, and scummed the water-lines of his two clean ships, which



ILLUSTRATED BY V. E. PYLES

dwarfed it with their long sweeping lines and piled superstructures, built to the grander scale of the open sea. Its shifting currents and treacherous channel reduced their prized speed to an irritating crawl in the stifling heat.

The commodore wondered what Washington could be thinking of, to place his ships in such a hole. He knew of course that the local brand of Reds was breathing down the neck of the recognized government here, as they were all over the world, but he failed to see how a little country of picturesque temples and sportive dancing girls, stuck off in a remote corner of Indo-China, could be considered a front in even a cold war. He hated Reds and all their works as much as any man who had been bred and trained to it, but he was not at all sure what Washington expected him to do about it. His mission in the secret orders from his admiral, which he had memorized as a matter of habit, stated that he was "to provide a show of force in support of the recognized government of Amman in its conflict with forces of rebellion led by one, Ha Tam Yang, reported to be a Communist."

A show of force. Showing the flag, they used to call it in the Old Navy. The commodore lifted his heavy gold-encrusted cap and mopped his high forehead with the handkerchief he kept wadded in his big fist. He lowered the cap on his thinning blond hair, glanced aft at the ensign drooping from the main gaff, and let his eyes run back over his guns, the five-inch turret mounts, the quadruple 40's, the twin 20's—all rapid-firing, all double-purpose. His full lips thinned in a slight smile. Not the flag, of course, but the guns, the naked power. What a mess he could make of this jungle with them. The sight of them was enough as a rule, to keep these little brown people in line, whatever their politics.

The smile faded and the eyes shoaled again. But that was in the old days, when these monkeys never had anything but a few old rusty rifles and obsolete machine-guns. These days, with the Reds involved in revolutions everywhere, there was no telling what sort of weapons might lay behind the encircling screen of a jungle. The skins of his destroyers were thin. Even one small field-piece anywhere along the banks of this overgrown creek. . . . Of course these monkeys never could hit anything. But at only a couple of hundred yards. . . . !

The commodore's eyes swept the jungle uneasily. A show of force. How much force was he supposed to show if this jungle variety of Red should decide his guns were a bluff? Too much saber-rattling could start another hot war. Too little could leave two proud U. S. destroyers sitting in the mud in the middle of the jungle, slowly rusting away under the amused eyes of a million little brown men. There'd be hell to pay in either case in a half-dozen world capitals, of course. But would that stop these monkeys?

The commodore glanced at the jaunty little river pilot near the helmsman, and suppressed a snort. He looked overdressed, but cool, in his crisp white cotton suit. An Ammanese government man,—but how far could you trust any of these Oriental half-breeds? And yet the safety of both ships was utterly in his hands. The commodore strolled into the pilot house and motioned the pilot to a forward window. He leaned close to the little brown man and cleared his throat.

"These Reds that are fighting your government,—you told me there weren't any of them along this river. Where are they all, then?"

The pilot flashed a dazzling mouthful of perfect white teeth, "Communist, they are in hill," he said, with an all-inclusive sweep of his arm around the low ridges that rimmed the river valley. "Captain not to worry!" he added, still grinning.

THE commodore flushed under his tan, and fixed the little man with a frown. Although his rank was captain, he was entitled, as a destroyer squadron commander, to be called commodore.

"Do they have artillery? Guns, that is—big guns—bigger than these?" the commodore pointed to the quadruple forty mount in its tub just forward of the bridge.

"Oh, yes," the pilot smiled, "Communist have big gun—like so." He pointed casually to the number two five-inch turret, and waited a few seconds for dramatic effect. Failing to achieve it, he

added lightly, "But they are only mortar, and they are not here. They are in hill near Sambor, to hit capital."

"Ah," said the commodore. "Only mortars, eh? How far are they from our berths in the river there?"

"One—maybe two mile," smiled the pilot.

The commodore nodded. "Thanks," he said, and resumed his interest in the winding channel as it narrowed toward Sambor. Well, he thought, they couldn't hit anything with mortars at that range, if I know these gooks. But it won't hurt to get up a few rounds of ammunition for the guns, anyway. The gunner's mates will be very unhappy about exposing it to this heat in the ready boxes, and the crew will wonder what they are getting into, but it will be easier for me to keep them aboard at Sambor. They'll know I mean it when I pass the word that the political situation is too explosive to let them go ashore. I'm glad I thought of that. I couldn't very well tell them I was keeping them aboard because of the loose morals of the place.

The commodore called Commander Swenson, captain of the flagship, out to the wing of the bridge where they would not be overheard by the pilot. "Make a general signal to fill ready-boxes with combat ammunition to one-fourth their capacity, and fill main battery ammunition trains with proximity fuses," he ordered.

If Swensen was surprised, he didn't show it. "Aye, aye, sir," he said, and started off to pass the word. The commodore stopped him. The thought of having all that ammunition on deck troubled him a little. He couldn't take a chance on having a gun go off accidently. Even that might start another world war.

"Add that no gun is to be loaded unless specific orders are received," he said.

The flag captain left the bridge wing. The pilot had slowed the ships to bare steerage way to maneuver them around a bend so sharp that they momentarily lost sight of each other. As the flagship rounded the bend, the commodore could make out the sprawling capital of the country, crowded between the hills and the river where it widened ahead of him, and walled on three sides by the jungle. He was surprised at the size of the town as the ships crept toward it, their crews mustered along the rails at quarters.

The town had a certain grace, and an unexpected cleanliness, with a few wide central avenues and a half-dozen two and three story stucco buildings that would have done credit to his home town of Sedalia, Missouri. The largest one, surrounded by a park in the center of town, the commodore correctly assumed to be the presidential palace where he would be paying his official call.

It was a pleasant surprise. From what he'd read about the place, he'd expected to find little more than a cluster of outlandish temples in a jungle full of monkeys in linen suits, producing nothing but silly superstitions, indecent dances, and babies. Even this president of theirs had a dozen legal wives, and Lord knows how many others. No wonder the birthrate was so high. The country was apparently run by astrologists, and even in the official language of the Navy monographs, sounded like something out of Gilbert and Sullivan. But only the waterfront, as his flagship drew abreast of it, conformed to the commodore's expectations. It was crummy, and teeming with dirty native craft and excited half-clothed crowds of spectators.

The pilot edged the ship toward the line of large mooring buoys in midstream. The commodore swept his glance around the cramped turning basin, and made a quick decision.

"I want both vessels turned around now, and moored bow downstream," he told the pilot.

The pilot's reaction was immediate. He shook his head vigorously, for once, unsmiling. "Cannot do now. President Niai Lieu say come straight to mooring. He wait for Captain."

THE commodore's eyes began to take on their shoal water hue. He was firm, and gave his reasons. It would take an hour to warp both ships around in the narrow channel, and he might not have an hour later when he needed it. He had to take precautions.

The pilot did his best. He recited all the reasons he could think of to moor the ships bow upstream, except the real

one. But they only served to fire the commodore's temper until he forgot entirely that this was a visit of state.

"If you can't do it, we'll do it ourselves!" he exploded, and went off to issue the necessary orders to his ship captains. The pilot looked as if he might weep. He threw up his hands and sulked in a corner of the bridge.

While the ships were being warped around, the commodore's temper cooled and he remembered his manners. He thought he could restore harmony by asking the pilot a pleasant question.

"Your president rates a 21-gun salute from a visiting man-of-war," he said. "Shall we give it to him? Just one-pounder blanks, of course—a lot of noise and smoke."

The little man looked at him dully, nursing his hurt feelings. "I beg pardon?" he said.

"The national salute!" barked the commodore. "Twenty-one guns. Shall we fire it now, or dispense with it entirely?"

The pilot's big brown eyes flew wide with alarm. His mouth dropped open. "Oh—no—no—no—no!" he stuttered, "No gun! Please not to shoot gun!" His brown fingers clutched the commodore's sleeve as he stared anxiously up the river.

"So?" frowned the commodore, and issued orders to fill the ready-boxes to half their capacity and station an alert watch on the guns. He ordered a boat lowered to put the pilot ashore, with his apologies to the president for the delay, and for the omitted national salute.

As the pilot was leaving the commodore made another attempt to restore friendly relations. "That was a nice job you did in bringing us up here so smoothly and quickly," he told him at the rail. "A very tricky channel. I'd hate to have to run it alone."

The little man could be magnanimous, too. He showed his teeth. "Thank you. Thank you so much. If you will tell the president? He was very anxious that you arrive with safety and swiftness." He clambered expertly into the boat, leaving the commodore to wonder whether there was any special significance in the remark.

When the ships had been moored as the commodore wanted them they were promptly assailed by a hovering swarm of native bumboats, excitedly hawking everything portable, from leering brown idols in bright boxes to smiling brown girls in bright pareos. The commodore noted that his sweating young watch officers were successfully, if reluctantly, repelling the assault, and then retired to the coolness of his air-conditioned cabin to take a cold shower and change his sweatsoaked uniform for the crisp, fresh one his messboy had laid out for him. It was gaudy with his brightest gold and gay with the four and a half rows of star-studded combat decorations across the chest.

He emerged refreshed and expansive and sent for the squadron flag lieutenant. "Well," smiled the commodore, "let's go. I should have some kind of bodyguard, I suppose, and you can charm the dancing girls while I talk to the president. I understand the palace is full of them."

The lieutenant laughed, and the officer of the deck piped them into the boat. There was a racy-looking French sport car, with chauffeur, waiting for them on the dock, escorted by another full of native police. They were the only cars in town, apparently, although rickshaws, bi-

Niai Lieu spoke perfect English with an Oxford accent.

cycles, and pedestrians were everywhere, stirring up the dust in the streets.

The commodore kept his eyes open for signs of discontent among the people, but noticed none. They were a rag-tag lot, he decided, but they seemed cheerful and friendly enough. "Of course," he told the lieutenant, "you can't tell what these Oriental people think of you by looking at them." The lieutenant agreed, and the commodore confined the rest of his remarks to lauding such aspects of the town as he could while staunchly ignoring its smells.

THEY were both pleased to find the presidential palace, clean, airy, and comfortably if somewhat over-lavishly furnished. The commodore agreed with the lieutenant that the several young ladies peeking at them from behind their fans in numerous doorways had uncommonly pretty eyes and shapely hips. He left the young man to make what he could of it while he, the commodore, passed on with his guide through a succession of gilded anterooms into the strictly Hollywood Modern presidential chamber.

President Niai Lieu looked even younger than the commodore expected. He was a well-scrubbed, well-fed young man of about 30, in Western dress, with dark, handsome features and an artful charm that the commodore instantly distrusted. He wore so many rings on his fingers that the commodore supposed he probably had bells on his toes, also, and he was without doubt, the commodore decided, the most fragrant president in the world. He looked like the ladies' man he was reputed to be, smoked American cigarettes in a long, jeweled holder that he waved like a wand when he talked, and spoke perfect English with an Oxford accent.

After politely refusing a variety of drinks, food, and other more subtle offers of entertainment, the commodore brusquely extended the best wishes of the United States government to the Free and Independent Republic of Amman, and then got down to cases.

"Is it true," he asked, "that this revolution reported to be in progress here is backed by the Soviets?"

Niai Lieu waved his jeweled wand airily. "Oh, yes," he smiled. "There's no doubt that Russia is supporting Ha Tam Yang. After all, he's Moscow trained, you know."

"With arms and money?" asked the commodore.

"Some. Talk and printing is cheaper, of course, and the Russians like to do things the cheap way." The young president laughed.

The commodore didn't think it was funny. "Just how much is some?" he asked.

"Oh, a couple of dozen mortars, maybe a half hundred machine guns, and a couple of thousand rifles, with plenty of ammunition for everything." The young man took a rolled map from his desk drawer and handed it to the commodore. "I know how interested you military men always are in the tactical situation," he smiled, "I had my chief of staff prepare this range chart for you, not only listing all the Communist weapons, but showing exactly where each is located."

The commodore unrolled and examined the chart. "If this is accurate, it's a remarkable piece of intelligence work," he commented.

The president waved it off with his wand. "Intelligence is easy in a revolution. There's so much shifting of loyalty with every propaganda wind."

"Ah," said the commodore, "I notice that practically all the Red strength is concentrated on these cliffs along the river not more than two thousand yards astern of my ships. Their G.H.Q. is shown there, too. Is that where this Ha Tam Yang hangs out?"

"For the duration of your ships' visit here," smiled Niai Lieu. "It makes an excellent observation post, you see, and it's practically impervious to assault or gunfire, except from the river. Our river pilot tells me that you insisted on turning your ships' backs to those cliffs, in spite of his protests." The president didn't mention the commodore's display of temper, which the pilot had also reported.

The commodore was shocked by the idea of destroyers having backs. "My ships have just as much fire power astern as ahead," he said. "But I don't see that it makes any difference. No one is going

to make an unprovoked attack on two U. S. destroyers, anyhow. It would cause an international incident. Why, good Lord, it might start another world war! The Russians don't want another war any more than we do."

Niai Lieu leaned forward, observing the commodore's eyes with interest. "Amman is not Russia," he smiled. "And Ha Tam Yang is not a Russian. He's one of my own people, and I know him well. He's egged on by Moscow, of course, but he's not controlled by Moscow. He makes all his own decisions, based always on the local situation, not on the international situation, about which he knows little and cares less."

The commodore's eyes had begun to shoal. "Are you suggesting that the fool might actually fire on my ships? Why, it would be suicidal!"

"It would be if you fired back. But politics is a great deal like poker, and Ha Tam Yang is a bold gambler, playing for high stakes. If he should decide that the guns the United States has laid on the table in this game are a bluff, it would repay him richly to call it. For obviously, if he could humiliate the world's most powerful nation by forcing it to withdraw from the game in order to avoid what you call an international incident, his stakes would be won—my government would probably fall, and he would take over. In that case, you see, your visit would have done infinitely more harm than good. The people of my country put such store by what you call 'face.' We are, after all, Orientals, you know."

THE young politician leaned on one elbow, his cigarette holder poised motionlessly as he watched the commodore's eyes. They had grown noticeably greener.

"And what if I should return the fire?" the commodore asked coldly.

Niai Lieu's shrug was eloquent. "Then you would have called the Communist's bluff, and Ha Tam Yang's game would be lost—along with his life and that of most of his lieutenants, probably. In which case, the revolution would completely collapse, without leadership."

The commodore's eyes continued to reflect shoal water. He didn't like all this talk of bluffing. And yet—what the devil *did* show of force mean? It looked like the time of decision was at hand. But it was still a nasty decision to make. Either way he interpreted it, he'd be in the soup, if the Reds started anything. Dammit, why didn't the people in Washington think of things like that when they ordered these impossible missions? Possibly they had. Possibly the buck had been deliberately passed all the way down the line to him. All right then, dammit—they'd passed it to the right place—the commander in the field.

The commodore met the politician's quizzical glance. That damned supercilious smile—it never wore off. The commodore decided it was a smirk, and he'd had enough of it. He'd come to his decision, swiftly and positively, as a military commander should. He stood up abruptly and reached for his cap on the desk.

"Since this is a poker game, as you say, I'd be a fool to tip my hand," he said. "All I can say is that it's loaded with the kind of cards that usually mean either a court-martial or a decoration for a field commander, regardless of how they're played. I only hope your Mr. Ha Tam Yang doesn't try to call the hand—for his own sake. Meanwhile, I can at least remove the temptation."

The commodore squared his cap. "As the ostensible purpose of my visit is to extend the goodwill of my government to yours, and it's apparent that has been accomplished, I will appreciate it if you will order the pilots aboard my ships immediately. We will sail as soon as they are aboard."

The young Oriental's crisp charm seemed to suddenly wilt. He rounded the desk anxiously, "But, Captain—you can't do that! You were expected to stay at least two days!" He recovered somewhat, and tried to recapture his smile. "There is to be a state banquet tonight, and a grand ball tomorrow night. All the invitations are out—all the arrangements are made! We have some very lovely young ladies who are most anxious to meet you and your officers. You can't disappoint *them!*" The smile had become sly.

The commodore thanked him graciously for the hospitality, but was firm in his

regrets. "You can tell your guests that we were ordered to rejoin the fleet suddenly and unexpectedly," he offered. "After all, the Asiatic coast is long, with many trouble spots, and the U. S. Far Eastern Fleet is small."

Niai Lieu sighed, and pushed a button on his desk. "Alas," he shrugged, "I see I cannot keep you. I'm afraid all the lively entertainment I had planned for you may prove to be a rather sad affair for the guests."

To the young native Army officer who answered his ring the president spoke at some length in Ammanese, hastily playing some cards of his own with each sentence. The officer saluted without expression, and left.

"It will take a few minutes to get your cars here," the president informed the commodore, with something of his former charm. "Shall we join the ladies for a drink?"

The ladies, all of whom were attractive members of the presidential household in various interesting capacities, were found with the lieutenant, who had made out all right. The young president's few minutes wait for the cars turned out to be nearer a full hour, and in spite of the pleasant company, the commodore had trouble with his patience.

When the two naval officers were finally on their way back to their ship, the commodore hazarded an opinion. "I don't like that fancy playboy," he told the lieutenant. "With leadership like that, it's no wonder the government is in a perpetual state of trouble."

"He has a lot of nice wives," sighed the lieutenant.

The commodore gave the lieutenant a sharp look and rode the rest of the way in silence.

The trip back was pretty much a repetition of the trip up until the two cars, the other loaded with police as before, reached the dock area. There the crowds staring at the destroyers had grown thick, and the drivers unceremoniously leaned on their horns and charged into them. The spectators scrambled to get out of the way as well as they could, but the cars inevitably ground to a stop fifty yards from the boat landing, in a swarming sea of angry faces.

THE police in the lead car promptly piled out and waded into the crowd, cursing and swinging their clubs to clear a path for the naval officers. The crowd cursed and swung back, shaking their fists and shouting imprecations. To the lieutenant, it was a fine demonstration of how to start a riot, and had all the earmarks of a put-up job. But he reserved his opinion as he and the commodore climbed out of the car and made for the landing. Instead he said, "It sounds like these people don't like us so well, after all."

The commodore was grim. "They'd better confine their feelings to words," he said.

The police captain ran up and pulled at the commodore's sleeve. "Please to run!" he cried, straining toward the boat landing.

"I'm damned if I will!" swore the commodore, and marched in stony-faced silence through the howling crowd to his boat. As he sat down with disdainful dignity in the sternsheets, the lieutenant let out a yell.

"Look out, Commodore!"

It was too late. A concentrated barrage of fruit, vegetables, stones, and dirt descended in a long, looping trajectory from the detached flank of the crowd and landed heavily in the boat, splashing the commodore and the immaculate white seat covers with all manner of filth. A curious silence fell on the crowd. The commodore stood up stiffly, and brushed himself off with his hand, fixing the rabble with a twenty-gun glare. If the boat had been armed, he probably would have opened fire on he spot.

"Shove off!" he ordered the boat's coxswain, and sat down again, his eyes the color of turquoise. He turned to the lieutenant and spoke evenly, "It's just possible that a great many people will regret this little incident," he said, with an effort.

Back on his own deck again, he returned Commander Swensen's welcoming salute and spoke simultaneously, "Battle stations, Captain—both ships. Are those river pilots aboard yet?"

"No, sir."

"Well, they'd better hurry up, while I

still have control of my temper. Make the signal to prepare to get under way, and let me know when they show up."

"Aye, aye, sir."

The commodore cooled off a little in his cabin while he changed his uniform. He sent the president's range chart to the gunnery officer with instructions to use it to identify targets and establish ranges, if necessary, for both ships. By the time he reached the bridge he was quite civil again.

He joked a bit with Captain Swensen, and took his binoculars out to the bridge wing to watch the festivities, as he called them, going on ashore.

The crews of the two ships lounged and speculated among themselves at their battle stations.

The festivities appeared to have developed into a general riot. The police were still clubbing and pushing at the edges of the crowds, and somewhere a good-sized fire was sending up clouds of black smoke that drifted over the city, although the commodore couldn't make out what was burning. The crowds seemed to be concentrating their efforts on standing off the police. Shots rang out frequently from the town, there was a lot of screaming and shouting that could be heard even across the water, and the numerous U.S. flags which had flown over the town in honor of the visitors were one by one jerked down.

From the commodore's balcony seat in the middle of the river the whole show had the almost comic effect of a poorly staged amateur pageant. At that distance it was difficult to tell just what was going on on the stage. But the commodore didn't much care, one way or the other. He was enjoying a beautiful detachment. On the one hand, he had his abiding hatred of all Reds, but on the other, he had no love for the perfumed president in his Hollywood suite, either. They were all a bunch of monkeys as far as the commodore was concerned, and the happiest outcome of the festivities that he could imagine was for both to wipe each other out, so long as they left him and his ships alone. He considered that he had carried out his orders, made his show of force, and if it had no apparent effect, it was no fault of his. He was anxious

"Make the signal to prepare for action," the commodore said grimly.

to get out of this pestilent jungle and back to the clean sweep of the open sea. He turned to Commander Swensen, watching at his side.

"A pretty spectacle," he said. "If they keep it up, somebody's likely to get hurt. Haven't those river pilots shown up yet? They're certainly taking their time!"

BEFORE THE commander could answer, there was a hollow boom and a puff of white smoke from the cliffs up the river, astern. Almost simultaneously, a large mortar shell threw up a muddy waterspout extremely close alongside the ship's bow.

The commodore stiffened and stared. "My God, no!" he breathed. "They wouldn't! They wouldn't be such blasted fools!"

But as if in answer, there was another hollow boom from the cliffs, and another spout of river water rose close aboard, this time off the other bow.

"Make the signal to prepare for action," the commodore said grimly. "Load and train out all weapons that will bear and range, but do not—repeat, *not*—return the fire unless I execute a commence

firing signal. Get that signal in the air, too. I'll execute it if either ship is hit." His voice had taken on an almost joyous note. Now that his crucial decision had been translated into an order, he felt a definite weight off his chest. This, thought the commodore, is almost like old times. He watched the flag signals jerk to the yardarms, and wondered idly whether the fools on the cliffs could read them. The shadow of a smile crossed his lips. He was amused to discover that he didn't care.

The mortar shells kept falling at intervals, always close, but never hitting. Several heavy-calibre machine-guns opened up in short bursts, frothing the dirty water near the ships with impotent little dancing spouts, like spring hail. They, too, were close, but when neither they nor the mortars had so much as scratched the ships' paint after several minutes, the commodore began to smell cunning behind the smoke, and swore. This Ha Tam Yang wasn't such a fool, after all. He'd apparently learned that the American ships were about to leave and was merely throwing a little of his ammunition into the river to make it appear that he was forcing them out. Damn, repeated the commodore—now we've got to stay here at least another day.

But then that Red fox can do the same thing tomorrow—and the next day—and the next! Good Lord, we may be in this stifling hole for another week, being shot at every time we make a move to get under way until he runs out of ammunition, or gives up. Or else sneak off in the dark, like a couple of blasted coyotes—if those river pilots are up to it. The commodore sighed and relaxed disgustedly against the bridge wind-break to wait out the gunplay. It reminded him unpleasantly of those old horse-operas where the villain shot at the tenderfoot's feet to make him run.

At the guns the crews waited, too, silently bent over their pointing instruments or standing alert with shells poised near the breeches. Eighteen gun barrels of assorted sizes, and eight of the latest and deadliest type of anti-personnel rocket-launchers all pointed rigidly astern, unmoving. The commodore, accustomed to the uncanny parallel weaving of gyro-compensated gun barrels on the heaving decks of fast ships maneuvering at sea, grew fascinated by this steady, motionless stare of his guns—by this solid, immobile gun platform under him. Good Lord—aiming at a fixed target, at a known fixed range, from a fixed gun platform, ten miles inland! Who ever thought naval gunners would ever have it so easy! Those mortars, of course, were down on the reverse slope of the cliffs, hard to get at, but a tenth-of-a-second delay on the proximity fuses of his five inch shells, aimed to just graze the crest, would take care of that nicely, and his gunnery officers knew it.

Some perverse imp of impatience and vanity in the commodore's mind contended with his good sense for a heartfelt wish to see just one of those silly little shells go astray and hit one of his ships.

The imp achieved the wish. There was a distinctive crack of a small field piece from somewhere beyond the cliffs, and almost instantly, a nasty explosion at the foot of the commodore's bridge. It jarred him violently, and sent jagged pieces of shrapnel whining through the rigging. For a moment, the shock paralyzed the commodore's mind. But his temper responded instantly.

"Execute commence firing!" he shouted.

The deck under him leaped again as every gun on the ship fired as one. In the continuous cacophony that followed it was impossible to hear or even to think. He turned to see the other destroyer burst into an angry welter of flame and smoke as all its guns and rockets let go simultaneously also. Feeling almost constant pressure on his ear-drums, tasting the peculiar flavor of blood in his mouth that concentrated gunfire always gave him, the commodore fought to keep his eyes focused on that pitiful sitting target.

THE whole crest of the cliff and the slope beyond had erupted into a cloud of smoke, flame, and flying earth. The face of the cliff crumpled off and slid into the river, as if stabbed by a giant pitchfork.

For about a hundred seconds the com-

modore lived and breathed in the acrid fumes and hideous noise of hell, and then, no longer able to see what was happening on the cliffs, nor to tell whether any more shells came from there, he ordered, "Cease firing."

The quiet, by contrast, was almost intolerable. The smoke drifted lazily down the river on the gentle breeze. No one moved, nothing happened as the commodore waited—one minute, two, three—for the cliffs to speak again. They didn't. After five minutes he stepped to the gunnery telephone talker and took his headset.

"Were you spotted in on the G.H.Q. on that range chart?" he asked the gunnery officer.

"Yes, sir," came the prompt reply.

"Good," said the commodore. "Unload all your loaded guns on the target, and rest easy at battle stations."

Both ships flowered briefly into flame, and lay quiet. To the enthralled spectators on the waterfront, it must have seemed a final, magnificent roar of defiance, but to the commodore it was simply the easiest and quickest way to unload his guns. He noted that shortly afterward there was the sound of scattered small-arms fire beyond the cliffs, and assumed that the government military was mopping up—he hoped, in force. He asked for a casualty report from both ships, and focused his binoculars on the town again.

The revolutionary pageant there had taken a strange turn. The colorful crowd along the waterfront had, if anything, increased, but was frozen utterly motionless, as if mass hypnotized. In the streets, large sections of the populace were running toward the river, many of them carrying flags, and down one avenue a large column of soldiers marched toward the docks behind a blaring military band. The U. S. flags began to reappear on numerous staffs against the slowly softening sky of late afternoon, heightening the general air of excitement and celebration that pervaded the scene. It was a very odd—and very sudden—development for a general riot, the commodore was thinking, as Commander Swensen appeared at his elbow with the casualty reports he had requested.

The only hit suffered by either ship was the first one, and the only casualties were two men with shrapnel wounds who would be ready for duty again in a matter of days.

"That's two too many," said the commodore. "I'm sorry it had to happen. I'll drop by sickbay to see them, and then I'll be in my cabin. Tell the gunnery officer to return that government chart to me for my action report, and get word ashore to the president that I'd like a complete report of the results of our gunfire before we sail, if possible. You'd better ask him to hurry up those river pilots, too, or it'll be dark before we get out of the river."

The commodore spent a few minutes with each of the men who had been wounded, but his mind wasn't on it. He had just fought and won what he supposed would go down in history as the shortest naval gun action on record, but he didn't feel easy about it. He was confident that his decision to hit back hard if he was hit was, by all precedent and principle, perfectly sound—and would hold up in any court-martial, even if it led to another global war. But there was something else about the whole affair, now that he had time to review it in his mind, that just didn't strike him right. He couldn't quite put his finger on it—it had something to do with that peculiar holiday air in the town now. That was just too sudden. Either it wasn't genuine—or the riot hadn't been. Come to think of it, that riot had had an odd theatrical look about it—he'd called it festivities himself, in speaking of it to Commander Swensen.

Now that his temper wasn't involved, he could recall more clearly the faces of the crowd on the dock when all that stuff was thrown at him. He couldn't say that they'd looked very pleased about it. They'd looked more shocked and scared than anything else.

It all goes back to that damned parlor snake president of theirs, the commodore swore. They don't come any slipperier than that. He and his poker game. I'll bet he's dealt off the bottom of the deck somewhere in this deal, and it'll be the ruin of me if I don't somehow put my finger on it.

IN his cabin, the commodore sat down to try to organize the thing on paper, but he hated paperwork, and his mind kept insisting that there was an important piece missing from the picture, anyway. He decided that it would probably show up in the report he had asked for from Niai Lieu, and climbed the ladders to the bridge to pace off his rapidly mounting restlessness there while he waited for it.

He noted that there were now two military bands blaring ashore, that the waterfront was completely packed with both military parade formations and flag-waving throngs of civilians, and that the bumboats were again swarming around the ships, some of them this time trying to give away their wares as presents to the crews.

In the midst of all the noise and confusion, he saw the pilot boat head out from the landing and in his anxiety so far forgot protocol that he went down to the gangway to meet it.

The pilot mounted the gangway as if he were mounting the forty-nine sacred steps to the Golden Throne. On deck he beamed and bowed so low that it was almost a salaam. If he had a tail, thought the commodore, he would wag himself overboard.

His flowery praise of the commodore, the ships, the guns, and the U.S. Navy in general was so ecstatic that the commodore was afraid he would end by crowing like a rooster. The commodore was finally forced to interrupt him to find out if he had any message from President Niai Lieu.

The pilot whipped a thick, well-sealed envelope from an inner pocket and presented it to the commodore with a flourish.

The commodore tore it open and he saw at a glance that it was, indeed, a very full report of the results of the gunfire. He noted quickly that the list of dead ran to fifty or sixty and that the name of Ha Tam Yang led all the rest. There was another page or two of wounded and prisoners, and several pages of captured material, all of which, he supposed, had been hastily typed up from those remarkable intelligence files. But the report was from the military command, not Niai Lieu. The president had merely countersigned it.

"Nothing personal from the president?" inquired the commodore.

"Ah," beamed the pilot, who had been waiting for that. He produced a fairly large, flat package with figured wrappings and many gold seals from another pocket. "Present!" he exclaimed. "Most wonderful present, special for Captain!" He launched into such an elaborate presentation speech in his quaint English that the commodore might have been highly amused if he had not been extremely impatient.

"No message?" he interrupted.

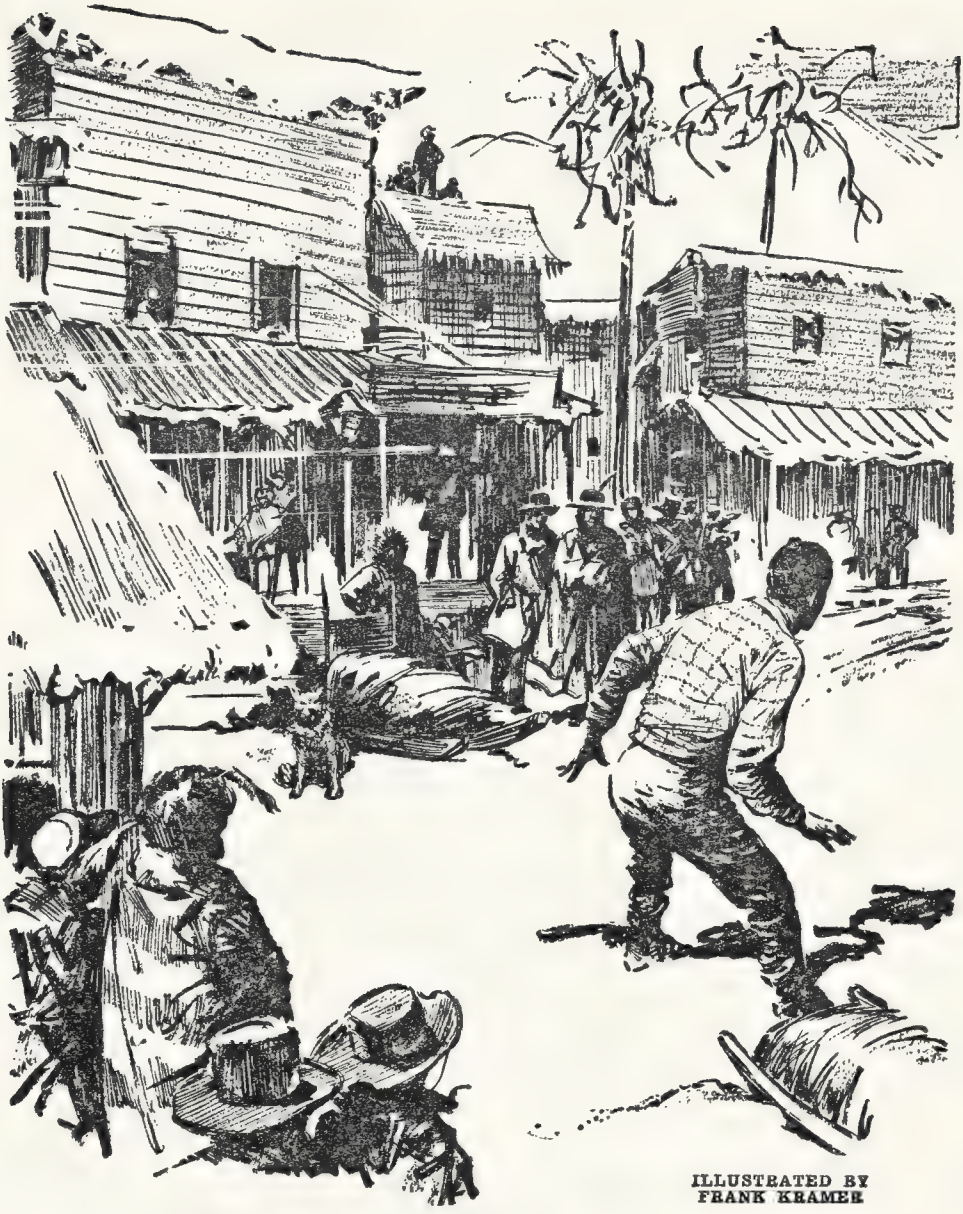
The volatile Ammanese threw up his hands in an appeal to heaven. The commodore sent both the report and the present to his cabin and brusquely suggested that it was past time for the ships to be getting under way.

From the bridge the general aspect of the town and anchorage was so festive that the commodore was moved to make some slight concession to it. In view of the president's gift, he thought that the previously omitted national salute might be appropriate, and besides, it might clear the bumboats out of the channel. He suggested it to the pilot, who gave it sufficient consideration to restore his dignity and then agreed, provided the saluting gun was pointed away from the town.

The little one-pounder drill gun banged out its measured twenty-one blank charges and the multitude ashore, after an initial surge of panic, settled down and cheered lustily for each bang. The bumboats scattered in haste. At the end, both military bands struck up their own version of the Star Spangled Banner, two bars apart. Both ships whooped three times, crescendo, to test their sirens, bellowed once to test their whistles, and solemnly parted from their moorings and headed down the river, the enthralled populace cheering them out of sight around the first bend.

The commodore, in spite of the nagging of his conscience to get at his report, dutifully kept the bridge until the pilots had been dropped at the river's mouth. During the passage, as he paced the starboard

(Continued on page 128)



ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK KRAMER

CROSSWIND

By

GEORGE E. GURLEY

Dan took off his mackinaw, laid it on the steps and started up the street toward Turk.

TURK HAGIN had always been a bad one. There wasn't a soul in Split Rock, or anywhere else around for that matter, that could lick Turk, drunk or sober. The last fellow that tried it was a big Swede logger from down the lake. It was one night in Harry's Place. They had been playing cards. Turk was edgy and the Swede made the mistake of kidding him about his run of bad luck. The logger was a game one and he was giving as good or better than he took and it looked to the boys as if the fight might be going the Swede's way.

The Swede had knocked Turk down and he stayed there for a little bit, breathing real hard, with his face all bloody. The Swede grinned and came in again with those big ham fists cocked. He was too sure of himself and swinging wild at Turk's head, trying for a knockout. Turk dropped down low and hit the logger twice in the belly. The big lumberjack's eyes bulged out. He bent over trying to get his breath. Turk clubbed him again, a short vicious blow. The Swede crum-

pled down into the sawdust of the saloon. Turk stood over him for a minute and then walked out.

Turk was one of the best trappers in Western Canada. The old-timers used to say that it was the winters he spent alone way up on Agate Lake that made him mean the way he was. They said that if he had taken a partner, somebody to spend those cold, lonely days with he'd never have gotten the meanness in him. Turk was all right in his way. No trapper went as far out as Turk did at Agate Lake or ranged as far on the trap lines. He brought back prime pelts. It was a hard life and Turk was a hard man. He stood over six feet and was built like an old grizzly. If a grizzly bear was blond, Turk would have looked a lot like one. He was almost as hairy with that long yellow hair of his and the beard he always wore.

Agate lay up through Cougar Pass and after the first really good snow, nobody went into that country or came out again until spring. Those months up there in that white silence with nothing but a sled team for company would make a rock out of a man or drive him crazy.

THERE was one person in Split Rock that could handle Turk and that was Julie Beaudreaux. Julie and her mother ran the boarding house in Split Rock, best food within a thousand miles of Dawson Creek. Mama Beaudreaux was a plump, good-natured little woman. She was a hard worker and thought the sun rose and set in her daughter, Julie.

Turk had been crazy for the girl ever since he first laid eyes on her. Julie liked Turk well enough and some folks thought she might have married him if he would have ever settled down a bit. Julie must have understood Turk. He was sure wild about that girl. He'd come in drunk, no ten men could've handled him, eyes all red and big fists knotted. Julie would come to the top of the stairs, shake that raven head of hers and yell down at him.

"Hang you, Turk. Get to bed and sober up. You're no good." She was all French, she'd stand there with her hands on her hips, black eyes snapping and bawl Turk out.

Turk would keep saying, "Yes, Miss Julie, I'm mighty sorry." He'd stand there in the front room of the boarding house, muttering to himself and then he'd walk outside and pump cold water on his head.

Things went along like that until the winter of the big snow. The Pass was blocked for a long time and Turk was late getting down. When he finally made it, he didn't even have an outside chance with Julie. Dan Halloran had come back.

Dan had left Split Rock when he was little more than twelve, right after his old man had died. He'd gone down country somewhere and been raised by an old maid aunt. He went into the RCAF when the war came along and flew all through those early days in England. After the war, he knocked around a bit, flew for a while as a bush pilot, but he finally came back to Split Rock. The whole town went down to see him land that plane of his. It was a fire-engine red and had skis on it for the snow.

Julie and her Ma had come to Split Rock after Dan had left, so he didn't know anything about the girl. He went to the boarding house to get a room and from then on, it was Dan and Julie. They were together all the time. You would see them heading down the street with their skis over their shoulders or coming in from skating at the lake. They sure looked happy.

While Dan and Julie were having such a time of it, the old men would sit around the stoves in Harry's place and the Post, cutting their sticks and mutter about what would happen when Turk came down in the spring. It got so the whole town was waiting just for that Bets were placed.

Dan was a fine young fellow. He wasn't what you'd call handsome. His face was a little too rugged for that and his nose looked like it had been broken too many times. He had a wide silver streak running back through his dark hair. He'd laugh about it and say that someone must have frightened him during the war. His eyes were blue and they had little lines around them, it must have been from squinting at the sun. Dan's eyes didn't look as old as the rest of him. He wasn't as heavy as Turk but he was just as tall and he moved real easy like. You could tell by looking at his shoulders that he was

a hitter, and he didn't look like the kind that would go down easy

Still, everyone knew what Turk was like and the odds were in his favor. If Dan put Turk away, he'd be the first one to do it. The whole business didn't seem to worry Dan and Julie any. Some of the folks tried to warn him about Turk but Dan would just laugh, "He's a pretty bad boy, huh? I guess I'll find out when the time comes."

They were a fine pair. Both of them were dark and straight as two arrows. Since Dan had come the girl was a thing to see, always laughing and happy. She was a neat, trim thing the way French women often are.

The thaw was a long time in coming, but from the day when the town woke up to the dripping of the snow off the roofs everyone watched and waited. No one ever knew who told Turk, maybe no one had to, maybe he just knew. Turk got in town just before noon one Saturday. He went straight to the Post and checked in all his pelts. It took him a couple of hours to get all checked in and paid for the skins. It was a little after two o'clock when he came out and he was looking for Dan. There was a tenseness and expectancy in the air

DAN wasn't hard to find. He wasn't running anywhere. He was just sitting on the steps of the boarding house. Julie was upstairs, looking out the window of her room. Dan saw Turk coming down the street with a big crowd following him. Nobody wanted to miss the fight.

All the 700 people in Split Rock and their dogs were out to see those two have it out. Turk was sloshing down the main street at the head of a big bunch of folks. More were coming up the street from the other direction and people were trickling between the board fronts of the buildings. Even the old Indians that sat outside the Post nodding in the sunshine were padding toward the fight. Some twenty or thirty people were on the top of Mac's General Store. You could hear the old board walks rumble under the running feet. Two kids had climbed the flag pole in front of the Post Office and were yelling for everybody to hurry up.

Dan took off his mackinaw, laid it on the steps and started up the street toward Turk. They met in front of the Post Office and neither one of them had said a word. They just met in the middle of that muddy street and there never was such a fight. Nobody was around to count ten or ring a bell every three minutes. If you got your man down, so much the better, put the boots to him while you had the chance.

Turk got in the first lick. He came in fast and caught Dan a glancing blow on the head that would have shook a young pine, if it had landed square. The crowd groaned but those that watched closely saw how easily Dan rode with the punch. They also saw Dan's left hand dart into Turk's beard and Turk was spitting blood.

They went back and forth across the street. Dan was the quickest. He would roll his shoulders into it every time he'd hit Turk and you could hear it splat all the way up the street. Both of them were silent, the only sounds were their grunts as they hit or took one and the crack of the blows when they landed.

Finally Turk caught Dan. He opened a cut above Dan's right eye that went to the bone, just like he'd used a knife on him. Dan went down and Turk got to him and kicked him twice. You could see Dan's face work every time Turk's boot landed. Turk drew back, he was aiming for Dan's head, when he slipped in the mud. He tried to get up too quickly and slipped again.

By that time, Dan was on his feet. He was weaving, but he was up again. Turk had taken his share of punishment too, that blond beard of his was streaked with red and his big parka wasn't helping him any. Turk was just standing up from the last time he'd slipped when Dan hit him with everything he had. It sounded like a bat on a good hit ball. Turk's mouth dropped open and the blood ran down into his beard. Dan hit him again.

Turk couldn't get up. Every time he'd get to his knees Dan would hit him, first with one hand and then with the other. Dan would hit Turk and his face would twist with the pain of it Both of his hands were split all the way across the knuckles.

Finally Dan grabbed Turk's beard with his left hand. He jerked Turk's head for-

ward and hit him with his right at the same time. It made a crunching sound. Turk slid face down in the mud. Dan walked over and sat down on the top steps of the boarding house with his head in his hands. Only then did Julie leave the window and throw herself face down on the bed. She was crying. It was all over. Turk left town the next day, few saw him go and nobody knew where he went.

Dan and Julie had quite a summer of it. They were down at the lake almost every day. They would be out in the canoe, fishing and swimming or just drifting along with the wind. Sometimes you could hear them laughing and see the young, tanned bodies flashing wet in the sunshine as they swam.

Toward the end of the summer, they sat down at the big table in the kitchen and had a long talk with Mama Beaudreaux. Of course, they wanted to get married. Mama sat there at the big table with her face cupped in her hands looking at one and then the other. She laughed. "You two are young yet. You've got plenty of time. I'm not telling you not to get married. You just wait a while. You've got all the time in the world to raise a family and get old and fat like I am."

So, they agreed to wait. Julie was little more than a girl and Dan wanted to have a try at trapping for a season and possibly pick up a little stake for them to get started on.

THE cold was coming on and overhead the long flights of geese were sweeping down to the south when Turk came back to town. Dan was sitting on the porch of the boarding house smoking when Turk walked up to him. Folks said later that it was probably the hardest thing Turk ever did in his life. He stood there blinking in the morning sunshine and looking down at Dan.

"You're the only man that ever whipped me."

"It wasn't easy," Dan said, "I don't think I could do it again." He stood up and grinned, and they shook hands.

Turk talked slowly. "I've heard it told that you're planning to run a line this year?" Dan nodded and Turk went on, "I don't know much, but there's one thing I do know. I know the woods. I've got the best run of anybody around. Once you're in there, you ain't coming out again until Spring, but there's plenty of fur and it's all good. I'd be glad to have you come in with me, we'd go it fifty-fifty."

Dan stood looking at Turk for a minute. "I know there's no one knows the country like you do. I'd do my share of the work, and I'd be happy to go." That was all there was to it, the whole thing was settled.

Something like that doesn't stay private long. Pretty soon the town was buzzing with the news. Lots of folks thought Dan was off his rocker. They said that only one man would be coming out next spring and that would be Turk. But there were a few things the rest of the folks didn't know.

For one thing Turk and Dan weren't going up to Agate Lake with a dog team. No sir, they were going to fly up in that red plane of Dan's. It would be quicker, they could cover more territory and if they needed to, get out in a hurry.

They worked hard the last two weeks before they left. They had to lay in all their supplies. Extra gas tanks had to be installed on the plane. Turk and Dan were flying almost every day. Dan hadn't been up much during the summer and he wanted to be sure of himself before he tried to take the plane into Agate Lake. "Once we're in," he would say to Turk, "I can darn well fly her out again."

Since the plane had skis, Turk said that after the first freeze-up and good snow, the shallow end of the lake where the cabin was, would be strong enough and with plenty of room to land.

Then there was something else. Much of that time during those last few weeks before they left was spent in teaching Turk how to fly. Dan had said, "Look here, Turk. Something could happen to me up there. There isn't anything to handling one of these little kites. I'm going to teach you how to fly."

Turk had the coordination of a man who has lived all of his life in the open and it wasn't long before he had the knack of the plane and could handle her pretty fair.

Turk had almost laughed when Dan

had offered to teach him how to fly. It made things so much easier. This way he could kill Dan after they were in at the lake and get away with no trouble.

All summer Turk had stayed in the woods like a wounded animal and thought about killing Dan. He would brood about it for hours. He didn't want to kill him just any way. He could have used a knife or dropped him with a rifle a hundred different times during the summer. He used to creep to the edge of the lake and watch them in the canoe. No, he wanted Dan to die alone up there in the snow, to know the fear and death that lived side by side with you in that country, to know the terrible, gnawing loneliness as he had known it.

He had to get Dan up to the lake someway, so he offered him the partnership. Turk was afraid when he asked Dan. He was afraid that Dan wouldn't go into the woods with him. It was hard to keep the relief from showing on his face when Dan had said yes.

Turk kept watching the weather close. Finally he said, "We'd better get going soon. It's frozen good by now up there. We can't wait too long."

A few people went down to see them off. Dan and Julie stood off to one side. Turk was loading the last things into the plane and Julie was blinking at Dan to keep from crying.

"Be careful Dan. Turk's a strange man."

Dan laughed, "Don't worry, girl, I'll be back here with the spring. I'll be back all right."

The crowd stood waving as the ship moved away into the wind and gathered speed for the take-off. Dan circled the town once, gaining altitude and then he headed north. Julie watched until there wasn't even the sound of the engine, just a swiftly vanishing red speck in the sky.

Dan flew low. It was hard to pick out any landmarks with the snow so deep. He glanced at Turk every once in a while. Turk sat beside him, silent, looking down at the snow that fled beneath them. He rarely spoke except to point out something.

Once he nudged Dan and pointed off to his side of the plane. He laughed and Dan thought there was something strange in his manner and eyes. Dan followed Turk's pointing finger. Turk grinned. "It's a big pack. Look at them. They're after that deer." A doe was out in front of the wolf pack, she was floundering in the deep drifts.

"They'll pull her down in a little while. The pack will stay with her until she's good and tired and then they'll cut her down from behind. She hasn't got a chance." Dan felt sorry for the doe down there alone with the wolves running easily behind her.

TURK was talking again. "Man or beast can't live up here unless he's strong and knows the country. It would be just like that doe." Dan looked at Turk. He wondered at what he saw in his eyes. Behind them the wolves were overtaking the doe.

They had to climb to make it over the pass. At the crest, Dan set the ship in a slight glide and cut back on the throttle. The country was wilder now. The mountains were like great teeth below them, the peaks rising sharp and bare above the timberline. In the valleys Dan could see the heavy stands of timber, the trees stood out black against the snow.

"There it is," Turk said, "that's Agate Lake." Ahead of them on the horizon Dan could see the lake. The timber pressed like a dark wall close around the water.

In a little bit they were over the lake. Turk pointed down. "You can see where it's frozen solid up in the north end. The cabin is back in the trees out of the wind, off that little neck."

Dan banked the ship back and forth over the north end of the lake. The ice looked smooth and there was plenty of room. He eased the craft down. It was a small plane and with all the equipment, they had a heavy load. He had to be very careful.

Dan babied it down. There was a bump and they were in, taxiing toward the shore. A little way out, Dan cut back the throttle and they stopped with the engine idling.

"What's the matter?" Turk asked.

"Nothing," Dan said, "keep her turning over, I want to get out and check that

ice by the shore. It looks like it might be rotten."

Dan unhooked his safety belt and got out. Turk's hands trembled as he slid into the pilot's seat. Dan was already out in front looking at the ice. Suddenly something inside Turk snapped.

"This is it, leave him now. You won't get another one like this." With his left hand Turk hit the throttle and kicked savagely at the rudder to swing the ship around.

As the engine roared, Dan wheeled, amazement and disbelief written on his face at what he saw. Turk was laughing with a strange fury. It was the face of some wild thing that Dan saw in the plane. Turk's lips were drawn back over his teeth, the whites of his eyes were showing. Dan stood still watching the plane lurch off down the ice. He was cold all over. He could hear the whine of the engine as Turk fed more gas for the take-off.

Inside the cabin, Turk was having trouble. He had never flown with so much weight. Already the air speed indicator was past the mark where he usually lifted the ship from the ground. The wheel felt heavy in his hands, the ship sluggish. Turk didn't know that in his haste and madness, he was trying to take the plane off cross wind.

He hadn't bargained for this. He began to get panicky as the snow melted swiftly under him and the ship kept rocking from the cross wind. Already the trees on the far side of the lake were much closer. In a flash of fear, Turk tried to pull the plane into the air. At that instant, a strong gust struck the ship and flipped the left wing high.

Turk pulled the wheel back too sharply, the air speed dropped swiftly and the wheel was mushy and dead in his hands. Frantically he tried to get the nose down. The controls had no effect. He sat powerless as the ship quivered for a moment and fell off to the right in a perfect hammerhead stall. Turk had an instant's glimpse of the ice rushing to meet him. He screamed and that was all he remembered.

Dan was running before the plane ground into the ice. As he ran, he could see it was a total wreck. The right wing was completely sheared away and broken into pieces, the tail assembly was snapped, both skis were buckled under the body and the engine was rammed back into the fuselage. For some reason it didn't burn.

Turk was in the cockpit slumped over the wheel. At first, Dan thought he was dead. There was a huge cut across Turk's forehead. The blood poured down his face, but he still breathed.

It didn't take Dan long, he worked frantically. There was a piece of the wing he could use for a sled and all their supplies were still in the plane. He found some rope and blankets, wrapped Turk, tied him to the wing and started the long pull over the ice toward the cabin. Turk wasn't a small man and it was tough going. Dan kept falling on the ice. It was over a mile to the cabin but he finally made it. He got Turk in a bunk and a big fire going. With the first aid kit from the plane, he managed to partially stop the bleeding from the cut.

As he had eased Turk into the bunk, he had noticed something else, Turk's left arm was broken. It was a simple fracture, the bone hadn't broken the surface of the skin, but there was no doubt the bone was broken. With an ax, Dan cut some branches for a splint. He set the arm gently, as best he could.

Then he went back to the ship for more supplies.

The cut on Turk's head was still oozing blood and the edges gaped open. Dan was washing it gently when the figure on the bunk stirred. Turk opened his eyes. Dan was sure he would have to sew up the cut, he had found a needle and strong thread in the supplies.

"Can you hear me, Turk?"

Turk nodded.

"I've got to sew this cut on your head up someway. It's going to hurt like hell. I'll give you something to bite on. Think you can stand it?" Again a slow nod.

Dan stuck a rag in Turk's mouth and moved two candles over from the table. With his good hand Turk grabbed the bunk and Dan set to work in the flickering yellow light of the candles and fire. The first time Dan stuck the needle through the cut, Turk quivered, then only the muscles in his jaw and the tendons of the hand that gripped the bunk told the story.

The hand relaxed and Turk slept.

DURING the next day, Dan made repeated trips to the plane. He finally had it unloaded and everything stored in the cabin. He spent the rest of his time watching Turk, getting the cabin in shape and cutting wood. There was nothing else he could do. When Dan dressed the cut on the third day, it wasn't so red and inflamed and some of the swelling had gone from the arm.

Turk was delirious part of the time. He kept muttering over and over to himself, "Wouldn't have a chance, wouldn't have a chance." Dan knew what he meant.

Late in the afternoon on the third day after the wreck, Dan was sitting before the fire, smoking and watching the man on the bunk. Turk opened his eyes and looked at Dan. His voice was little more than a whisper.

"You should have left me in the plane. You should have left me out there in that wreck to die."

Dan said nothing and Turk went on. "I thought about it all summer. Thought about how I'd get you up here and kill you when the time came. You wouldn't have lived a week without supplies."

"I know it," Dan said. "It's all over now, forget it."

Dan took good care of Turk and you couldn't keep a man like Turk on his back for long anyway. The cut was healing fast and the arm seemed to be mending in good shape. It wasn't long before Turk was up, working about the cabin. He wasn't strong enough to help run the lines but he told Dan where and how to set the traps. Dan ran the lines and Turk would help with the skinning and drying. Gradually Turk's strength came back and finally the only thing to remind him of the wreck was the great scar that ran above his eyes. Dan always acted like nothing had ever happened.

Turk was like some big dog. After he was fully recovered, he tried to do everything. He wouldn't hear of Dan breaking trail or taking the heaviest load. It got to be a joke with Dan. They had good luck all winter and the fur cache got bigger every time they ran the lines.

They used to sit before the fire at nights, with the wind whipping at the cabin, and talk. Both of them learned a lot from those talks. Turk knew he had found the first real friend he had ever known.

The weeks were slipping by and Turk turned to Dan one night and said, "We can start out in another week or so. It'll take us a while, but we'll make it."

Dan grinned at Turk. "Yeah, I guess we'll make it, Turk. You missed your chance." They laughed together.

Three weeks later they cached all their furs so nothing could get to them. Dan said that when they got back to Split Rock they could make arrangements for another plane to fly up and bring out the fur.

When the snow went out and the lake was all blue again, the folks in town kept listening and watching for the plane. Finally it was clear that it wasn't coming.

Julie went about her work, she was quiet and her face was set. Only once did she give any sign. A bunch of boys were in Mac's Store talking about Turk and Dan. Julie happened in and overheard.

She stood before the men, her face white and tears in her eyes. "Dan will be back. He'll come out. I know it, he promised he'd be back in the spring."

A month had gone by. I guess everyone but Julie had given up hope when one afternoon there was a hooting and yelling down by the Post. Everybody in town started that way. Coming up the street, with beards down to their belt buckles, were Dan and Turk. They were both grinning from ear to ear and folks said later that it was the first time they'd ever seen Turk grin. The crowd opened up to let Julie through. Everyone was yelling at once.

"Where's the plane? What happened? Where did you get that scar, Turk?"

Turk opened his mouth like he was going to say something but Dan beat him to it. "I had some bad luck landing the ship, had her loaded too heavy. I wrecked the plane and kind of messed Turk up in the bargain."

A month later Julie and Dan were married. Turk was probably the biggest best man Split Rock ever had. He sure looked awkward in that suit.

The town never really knew what happened up there in the snow. That scar of Turk's was talked about a thousand times over the whittling knives and tobacco juice—but nobody ever knew for sure.

One Live Chinaman

THEY were international scum, riffraff from the four corners of the earth, aboard the rust-bucket steamer, *Manioc*, which carried a general cargo as a front for her more nefarious activities, ranging from simple smuggling right down to what is listed as piracy in the books of admiralty law. It was all the same to the *Manioc* and her crew.

Piggy Murchison, the mate on watch, was drunk on the Skipper's private stores the night it happened. There could have been no other excuse for the mass-murder, for the night was lake-calm, a brilliant,

Rawlins drew up his feet and then uncoiled like a spring.

By CHARLES A. STEARNS

star-studded evening with the visibility unlimited. And yet they rammed the reef so hard that the tramper was scarcely above water for five minutes after the initial crash. Murchison had been foggily muddling over his charts when the quartermaster, a burly seaman named Adams, cried out his warning, and the next instant the sharp reef came slicing through the thin hull right into the foc'stle.

Someone took time to release the pelican hook of a four-man life raft, oddly enough, and it soon appeared that there were but four men left alive in the whole ocean to man it.

They straggled aboard one by one, the quartermaster, Adams, the master, a hulking man known as Rawlins, and finally the bow lookout, a weasel-like seaman appropriately known as "Worms." Later on they picked up Murchison, the mate, swimming aimlessly about in the sea.

ILLUSTRATED BY CHARLES GEER

THEY watched in bedraggled silence as the *Manioc* nosed up and heeled over to sink out of sight.

"Migawd," Worms said, after a while. It was the first time any of them had spoken.

Murchison was still pleasantly drunk. He grinned. "I read in a book that the Old Man leaves the ship last. How 'bout that, Cap'n?"

"You drunken fool." Rawlins lashed out with an openhanded blow that flattened the mate into the bottom of the raft. "I'll see you hanged for this when we reach port."

"Cap'n Rawlins, sir!" It was Adams, the quartermaster.

"Yeh, what d'you want?"

"There's a man out there, sir, clingin' to an old hogshead. You want I should swim out and tow 'im in?"

Rawlins squinted. "By God, you're right. Who is it?"

"Wa' minute," said Murchison, unaccountably producing a flashlight.

Rawlins took it and beamed it out across the water. The man on the barrel waved frantically and chattered in a high-pitched voice. Perfectly unintelligible.

"Ah, hell," Rawlins said. "It's that damn Chinese cook we picked up in Rangoon." He flicked off the light.

The quartermaster began to peel off his shirt.

"What're you doin', Adams?"

"Fixin' to go after him, Cap'n."

"Sit tight, Adams. I still give the orders here."

"But what about Soong, the Chinee?"

Rawlins' eyes were dangerous slits. "We already got full capacity on this here raft, ain't we?" The implication was plain. Even Worms was taken aback. The cold-bloodedness of the lightly veiled proposal lay on the raft like a chill blanket.

Adams looked as though he wanted to say something, but he sat back down on the edge of the raft, glaring. Murchison giggled and Worms looked craftily from one to the other.

"Stop that infernal noise, Murchison!" Rawlins roared.

The mate lay down and went to sleep.

In the morning they found that there was exactly one quart canister of water for each man, the amount prescribed by law, strangely enough, and the seaman, Worms, whiningly demanded that it be divided up then and there.

Piggy Murchison had sobered during the night, and the first glimmering of the consequences of his crime was being visited on him. He whimpered constantly in fear and discomfort and his eyes never left Rawlins' face for a moment.

At noon Worms plugged a hole in his canister of water and took a deep draught of it. His imagination was strictly limited to the immediate future. "Migawd," Worms said, wiping his lips, "it ain't as bad as though they put the stuff in barrels like they used to, so's it got sour before you could drink it. These here tins is all right."

"Take it easy on that, you scum," Rawlins said angrily. "That's all of it, remember. When it's gone you get none of ours."

The seaman cringed. "It's mine, ain't it, Cap'n?"

"Senseless fool!" Rawlins said.

They squabbled incessantly throughout the day because there was something they were trying to ignore. A man they had consigned to die. So they quarreled as loudly as though separated by six furlongs rather than six feet.

DYING was the farthest thing from Soong's mind, however. He had clung stubbornly to his hogshead all through the night and about dawn he'd managed to scramble on top of it, riding it like a horse. From time to time they caught sight of him bobbing up and down out there, a ludicrous figure on the green vastness.

From time to time he waved at them and chattered his important message in rapid-fire Chinese, but they didn't seem to hear or even see him. So he finally gave up and lay on his belly across the hogshead, sadly looking at the four callous men so near and unapproachable, and so much better off than he.

The white men had rigged up a bit of canvas to keep off the most lethal rays of the tropical sun, but he had nothing. The Chinaman was being burned alive.

Adams, the quartermaster, could stand

it no longer. He said grimly, "Cap'n, I'm gonna give that Chink some of my water."

"Sit down," Rawlins growled.

"I'm gonna—"

Smack! A heavy fist thudded against Adams' head. His unopened water tin fell to the bottom of the raft.

The seaman was up like a flash, fists flailing wildly. Rawlins coldly drew up his feet and then uncoiled like a spring. He connected with Adams' midriff with such force that the quartermaster went overboard with an agonized grunt. He went down once, in the warm water, and came up clawing air. He found the edge of the raft with his fingers near where Worms was sitting. The little seaman grinned evilly and brought his fingers smashing down on Adams' hands so that he had to let go once more. He went under again.

Captain Rawlins coldly took the stub oar of the raft and waited until he broke water again. The oar swished through the air and crunched solidly against bone. Adams gaped like a fish. Then he sank down, down out of sight. In the amazingly clear water they could see him submerging for a long time, like a strange marine animal on its way to Davy Jones' locker.

No one said a word throughout the entire procedure. A hundred yards away the Chinaman, Soong, still bobbed, spectre-like, on his hogshead.

The second and the third day passed without event. Worms had hopefully gulped down the remains of his water, but something in Rawlins' face made him refrain from asking for his share of the extra can, left behind by Adams. Murchison had nearly half a can left and Rawlins nearly all of his. It was hellishly hot.

Rawlins sat in a corner of the raft, facing the others, with the canister in his shirt, so that it could not be taken from him if he dropped off to sleep, without awakening him. Murchison and Worms looked at him hungrily.

Worms' eyes were reddened now, and no longer completely sane, even by his standards. He said suddenly, "I got to have my share of that water now, Cap'n."

"Hell, yes," Murchison chimed in. "Le's have the water." He laughed crazily. "Might as well wash our feet in it for all the good it'll do."

"You ain't hurting yet," Rawlins said.

Late in the afternoon Worms crawled over to Captain's side once, whimpering that he couldn't stand it any longer. Rawlins shoved him back with his foot . . . On the top of a small crest they caught sight of the Chinaman, Soong, motioning for them to pick him up . . .

NEXT DAY, at two o'clock in the afternoon, the fat mate, Piggy Murchison, pulled himself over to the side of the raft and slid, crocodile-like, into the water. No one tried to stop him. At the last sight of him, he was paddling feebly around in circles, just as he had been that night when they picked him up. They examined his water tin and found it bone dry.

The rest of the day Worms lay in his corner without moving, his beady, ferret eyes fixed on the captain. There was something alien in his expression that made Rawlins shudder inwardly.

Twice that night he had to be roughly repelled by Rawlins to his own side of the raft. Worms awoke in the morning remembering none of this. There was a thick taste in his mouth and he found that his tongue would no longer permit him to close it completely. Worms pulled himself up to his knees. There, in plain sight, was Soong, invitingly motioning to him.

Worms picked up his empty tin and hurled it at the Chinaman. "Damn you!" he screamed. "Die, like a human being! Why don't you die like the rest of us!"

He would have said more but he found his voice reduced to a hollow croak, and the words that came out were gibberish. He saw that Captain Rawlins was asleep and an idea tortuously evolved in his feverish brain. He picked up the oar that had split the skull of one man already and crawled stealthily toward the captain on his hands and knees.

Rawlins, dreaming of trickling brooks and cool lakes, awoke to find the scrawny seaman standing over him, the oar half raised . . . Worms, caught in the act, creaked from somewhere behind his blackened tongue. His hollow eyes were malevolent; death was in them.

"I come for the water, Cap'n," he managed to say.

Rawlins gave him stare for stare for a good, long minute.

"O.K.," he said finally, "O.K., Worms, sit down and we'll divvy up."

The other had hoped for the whole can, not half, but the fear of the old man was still in his maddened brain, instilled through the years of subordination. He watched the gleaming eyes as Rawlins pulled the thing from his shirt front. It shone wonderfully, tantalizingly in the sunlight. Worms tried to lick his lips but found that he could not.

Rawlins bared his yellow teeth in a grin. "Look, Worms," he said, and pointed to the hole in the top of the canister. He turned it upside down and shook it. Not a drop came out. He tossed the empty can to the little seaman.

"You heartless devil!" Worms shrieked, swinging the oar. Rawlins caught the club in his hands, and the other suddenly dived for his throat, claws outspread. The attack was so quick that Rawlins found himself furiously trying to dislodge the talons from his neck. They rolled over and over in the boat, growling like beasts, the little seaman hanging on as a terrier would.

Rawlins finally broke the hold, but with such effort that the raft careened and they were abruptly struggling in the sea. Under water, Rawlins brought up his knee into Worms' midriff, then placed a choppy right to the other's jaw, treading water.

Worms went down, threshing in agony. Rawlins clung to the side of the raft now, endeavoring to climb back aboard, but there was something tugging at his foot He kicked viciously, but it hung on. Looking down, he saw the wavy outline of Worms, below him, clinging in death to his pants leg.

Rawlins cursed, first furiously, then in mortal fear. He could not dislodge the corpse. His grip was slipping from the raft. He champed his swollen tongue in impotent rage Then before he knew what was happening, the water had closed over his head. He looked up and there was murkiness above him, light disappearing forever as he went down . . . down.

He opened his mouth to scream but only bubbles came forth . . .

Soong shuddered from the haven of his barrel, but there was nothing he could do. And besides, his attention was now taken by something else. He could see a faint wisp of smoke on the horizon. If they would only glimpse the white canvas sunshade of the raft!

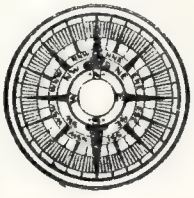
SOONG walked aboard. A trifle erratically, it is true, but he walked, nonetheless.

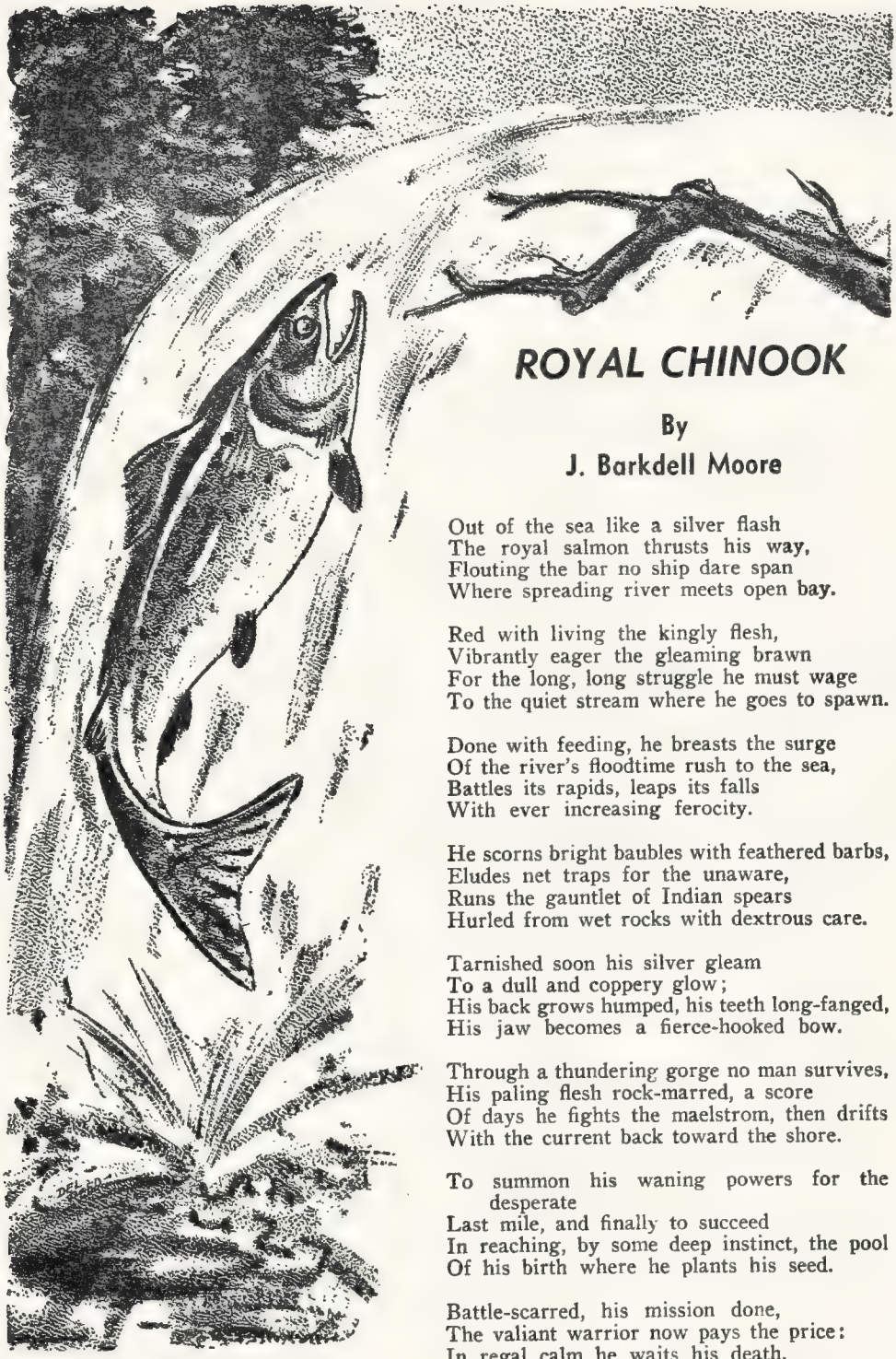
"Amazing," Captain Jorgensen of the *S.S. Rangoon* exclaimed. "Why the poor devil isn't dead instead of staggering weak, I'll never know."

"Weak, hell," said the pharmacist's mate, who had seen it all from beginning to end, having been one of the men who picked up Soong in the emergency boat. "Weak! The man's drunk, that's all. Remember the hogshead he was clinging to?"

"Yes!" said the captain and Mr. Peavy, the mate, at once.

"Well, it was half full of port wine," said the pharmacist's mate. "It's both food and drink, y'know, to a limited degree. The bloody Chink sucked the stuff out of the bung-hole with a bamboo straw he picked up some'res. Hell, yes, he's kickin' strong. I say it's a pity there wasn't more to escape the tub when she went down; there's enough in that there barrel to of kept six men alive!





DECORATION BY DEL REED

ROYAL CHINOOK

By

J. Barkdell Moore

Out of the sea like a silver flash
The royal salmon thrusts his way,
Flouting the bar no ship dare span
Where spreading river meets open bay.

Red with living the kingly flesh,
Vibrantly eager the gleaming brawn
For the long, long struggle he must wage
To the quiet stream where he goes to spawn.

Done with feeding, he breasts the surge
Of the river's floodtime rush to the sea,
Battles its rapids, leaps its falls
With ever increasing ferocity.

He scorns bright baubles with feathered barbs,
Eludes net traps for the unaware,
Runs the gauntlet of Indian spears
Hurled from wet rocks with dextrous care.

Tarnished soon his silver gleam
To a dull and coppery glow;
His back grows humped, his teeth long-fanged,
His jaw becomes a fierce-hooked bow.

Through a thundering gorge no man survives,
His paling flesh rock-marred, a score
Of days he fights the maelstrom, then drifts
With the current back toward the shore.

To summon his waning powers for the desperate
Last mile, and finally to succeed
In reaching, by some deep instinct, the pool
Of his birth where he plants his seed.

Battle-scarred, his mission done,
The valiant warrior now pays the price:
In regal calm he waits his death,
Immortalized by sacrifice.

THE FIRE BOSS

By
NORMAN E. BACON

"I'll tell you when to get out," Hogue said. "Now get back there and stay there!"

ILLUSTRATED BY JOSEPH FARREN

IT WAS two in the morning when Hogue grasped the edge of his blanket and, rolling once over, wrapped it around him like a cocoon. Pillowing his head on his boot, he dropped the forest fire from his mind, and was instantly asleep.

He was awakened by a shoe prodding him roughly in the ribs.

"Day's a-breakin'," a voice said.

Hogue grunted, and the other passed on. Hogue lay with his eyes closed, forcing himself awake. He was tired with a tense, muscle-aching tiredness that had not lessened in the brief hours of sleep. He roused slowly, rubbing his eyes open with hands coarsened by grime, raising on one elbow and feeling the cold air suck

against the fetid warmth of his body.

The odor of coffee forced itself into his brain, and presently he pulled on his boots. The loggers were snug and trim and gave a sense of lightness to his huge body. He ran his hand over the arch now, sleepily finding pleasure in their fit. When they were laced, he was clothed; they had been his only concession to sleep. He rose to his feet, stretched, yawned, shook his head in a vain effort to clear the cobwebs and stumbled toward the cook fire.

He half passed another sleeping form and paused. It was Hansen, one of his men. Hansen had defied him the day before on some small matter, and now resentment stirred in Hogue. He kicked Hansen.

"Get up!" he grunted.

Hansen groaned, rolled over and sat up, staring at Hogue. He was a slightly built kid, sandy haired and pale from sleep and fatigue.

"What the hell?" Hansen asked. His eyes were level and did not drop under Hogue's glare. This made Hogue angry. He could not tolerate Hansen's level, quiet eyes and his way of looking at him if he were holding him in judgment. Something burned inside Hogue whenever he locked eyes with Hansen. It made him unaccountably angry.

"Want to make something o' it?" he asked.

"Don't be a fool," Hansen said, and turned away from Hogue to pull on his shoes.

Anger flared in Hogue for a moment like a bright flame, then as suddenly died away against Hansen's turned back, leaving him shaken. It was too early in the morning. The tiredness and sleepiness claimed him again and he turned on to the cook fire. But it was not yet settled with Hansen. He would some day have to beat the flame out of Hansen's eyes. That would come surely as death, and he did not now know the reason for it, nor understand how much hate could be founded on so trivial a thing as the proper way to hold a shovel.

He got a tin plate and helped himself to the bacon and eggs on the plank counter. The smell of food helped cut the lethargy in his body and he realized he was hungry. He moved away a few steps with his plate and sat down on a log. There were other men on the log, some eating, some huddled in their blankets against the cold of the morning. Occasionally there was the subdued sound of speech; mostly they were silent.

Hogue ate with deliberate concentration; there was a dull pain behind his eyes from lack of sleep. Two days and nights with three hours rest. With luck, today should be the last. If not—he shrugged—he could last as long, longer, than the next man.

GARDNER, the Ranger in charge of the fire, came over and sat down beside him. He was a calm man, slender in forest green. He looked at Hogue thoughtfully.

"How do you feel?"

Hogue grunted. "Like hell."

Gardner smiled faintly. "Think you can hold that north line today?"

Hogue stabbed a slice of bacon impatiently. "How the devil do I know? Depends on the wind. If I had some men. . . ."

Gardner's lips tightened. "You've got the best we can find. They're not loggers, but they're good men."

"Skid road bums, farmers," Hogue said contemptuously. "They're yellow-bellied. No guts. Like that Hansen."

Gardner turned his eyes on him, and there was in Gardner's eyes some of the judgment that had been in Hansen's, and Hogue again felt the slow rush of blood to his head.

"You're too hard on your men," Gardner said. "Hansen was in the South Pacific and he's older than he looks. He comes from a good family. And I wouldn't question his courage; there's more to courage than physical strength."

"My fists always got me by," Hogue said. "I never seen anything or any man I couldn't lick with my two fists." He ate ruminatively for a while, then a thought stirred in his mind and he turned his eyes to Gardner. "So I'm too hard on my men. You trying to tell me how to run my job?"

"Just a suggestion, Hogue. They're human beings."

"Suppose you keep your damned sug-

gestions to yourself." He knew he'd made Gardner angry, and he didn't care.

Gardner got to his feet, his lips compressing and his eyes growing unfriendly. "We're short of experienced men, Hogue, or I wouldn't let you get away with that. You hit the trail in half an hour." He strode away.

Hogue stared after him, his own resentment swelling in him. He could break Gardner in two like a matchstick. Some people thought a tin badge made them godalmighty. But he'd got under Gardner's skin.

Presently, his hunger satisfied, he rose and started foraging the clutter of equipment and food for the needs of the thirty men he'd have under him.

He found some canteens, a cross cut saw and a couple of double-bitted axes. He stuffed two tins of corned beef in his mackinaw pockets. He heard the stomp of a horse on the far side of camp and found Jake Manning tying canteens on the saddle.

"We want some water up there today," Hogue said. "Ten hours yesterday without a drop."

Manning continued to rig the horse without turning. He was about sixty-five. Hogue had known him all his life. They had worked the same timber. Once Manning had been square and heavy like Hogue, but now his muscles and flank were gaunted by age.

"You'll get water in your turn," Manning said, with no show of annoyance. "I'm not twins."

"You get water up there or I'll break your neck."

"You'd look funny runnin' around with my axe handle stickin' out between your ears," Manning said, unruffled. He shortened a canteen strap and tossed it over the saddle horn. "You're takin' that north trail, ain't you? Come a little wind you'll be high-tailin' out of there with your rumps on fire by noon, anyway. I hear tell your backfire didn't burn."

Hogue was angered by Manning's argument. "We're sticking. You get water up to us, or I'll come looking for you. And when I finish with you, your own mother wouldn't know you."

He was serious now, and Manning knew it. He turned slowly, gazing at Hogue thoughtfully. "Just like you did Ben, eh?" he asked.

Hogue felt every muscle in his body grow rigid. "Damn you," he said.

"That hurts, doesn't it?" Manning said. "After twenty years can't you get square with your own conscience?"

It had happened when Hogue was eighteen. Hogue and Ben Dobson, the camp timekeeper, had been friends until the day Hogue thought he had discovered an error in his wages. He had got tough and Ben had called him a name. There had been a fight. Ben, smaller, and with a bookkeeper's muscles would not quit, and with each blow he had struck, Hogue had grown more enraged. He had beaten Ben until Ben could not rise. Ben had died two weeks later. The doctor had said Ben's heart was weak.

And now Manning had no right to bring it back. Hogue had put it behind him. For twenty years he had shoved away the memory of the light in Ben's eyes that could not be made to die.

"You were half way decent before that," Manning said. "It's time you got wise to yourself before you kill someone else."

Hogue made a step toward him.

"I'm an old man," Manning said. "I've been there and back and there isn't much left. You lay a hand on me, Hogue, and I'll kill you, so help me."

Hogue stopped, not so much from fear of Manning, but because he had no real desire to hurt him. Manning was of his own kind, his hands were his weapons and his livelihood, and Manning had been no angel.

"Go to hell," he said, and turned abruptly away.

DAYLIGHT was a murky presence when they headed across the burn going north. It had been a dry summer and the fire already had blackened five thousand acres of the best timber in Idaho.

The burn was a gray world. The fire had passed here two days ago, and now the ashes lay ankle deep in either side of the old logging road. Smoke spiraled upward from logs that had rotted under the moss and pine needles and now smouldered and would continue to smoulder

tor days. Occasionally fire licked out from a stump that contained a pitch pocket.

Hogue went through this desolation without feeling, walking steadily with the short, careful step of a man who worked in the woods, swinging his body with each stride like a bear.

He walked with his head down, the shovel swinging in his hand with regular, jerky movements, his face set and expressionless, his eyes alive only for the danger of falling snags. Occasionally, in the distance, he could hear a dull thud as the fire ate through a tree and dropped it into the ashes.

It was seven when they reached the point where they had made trail the evening before. After the wind had died down and the night had quieted the flames, they had hacked and shoveled a trail around the fire. This was Hogue's sector, a small part of the whole, and was joined on the far end by Gibbons and his crew, and beyond by someone else until the circle was completed.

Hogue cursed when he saw that Manning had been right and his backfire had not burned. There were still peninsulas of green brush and timber between him and the main body of the fire.

He strung his men like beads along the trail that was to be their patrol and set them to burning everything that would take.

This was rugged country and the trail ran along the side of a ridge. The virgin pine lay above them, and the ground was covered with pine needles and dead stretches of pine grass. Willow grew in thickets, and buckbrush and tangled patches of fallen timber made the whole thing a powder box. Below them, and stretching as far as Hogue could see through the murk and haze, the day-old burn smouldered and crackled fitfully at what was left of the timber.

In the early morning the fire was still comparatively quiet. He gave two men the crosscut saw and sent them into the burn after those live snags that might drop sparks across the trail. A faint draft, created by the heat of the fire, was moving up the ridge, sifting the smoke over their heads.

Hogue now began the endless job of patrolling his section. He prowled continuously. His men were tired and Hogue knew they were grumbling among themselves. Hogue himself was tired, so tired that he was restless with a nervous impatience. Once, he caught a man asleep, and he raised him to his feet with one hand in the other's shirt front and shook him awake. "Keep moving," he growled. "Do you want to get burned alive?"

Churlish resentment showed in the man's eyes for a moment, then died away against the bulk of Hogue's body.

"No, sir," he said. He began shoveling with a mechanical surliness. Hogue left him with a curse.

Half an hour later he found his saw team cutting a snag deep in the burn. One of the men was Hansen. Hogue watched them a moment, studying the snag with an appraising eye. Fire had denuded it of its branches, and it burned near the top with a tenacity that showered sparks and bits of lighted tinder into the air. At one point it was nearly burned through. Hogue saw the top section teetering, watched the men sawing at the butt, oblivious to danger, and plunged into the burn.

"Get back," he growled.

He lifted an axe in a swift arc that buried half its blade into the snag. The jar of the axe sent a tremor up the tree. The thirty foot top section swayed uneasily. Hogue planted his feet and swung again. The top broke loose and came knifing down.

Hogue watched its descent carefully, and as carefully, making certain that he didn't stumble he stepped to one side. The snag brushed by him and buried two feet of its length into the earth.

Hogue threw the axe to the ground. His eyes met those of Hansen and the old, unreasoning antagonism rose in him. "You idiot," he said. "You get back on the trail. If you can't watch what you're doing, you got no business with a saw. Take a shovel to the end of the trail. And stay there."

Hansen flushed, his eyes bright. Hogue was singling him out of the two. For a moment Hogue thought, with anticipation, that Hansen was going to make a fight of it. Then Hansen shrugged. "It's your fire," he said. He went back to the trail. His back was straight and contemptuous and Hogue's muscles tightened in anger.

BY NINE o'clock the sun had begun to make itself felt. He could see it as a white ball through the smoke, hanging like a brilliant full moon in the sky. So dense was the smoke, he could stare at the sun directly without hurting his eyes. He discarded his coat, keeping one can of beef in the pocket of his levis, and sucked deeply at his canteen.

So far there had been no trouble. But it was coming; the fire was too big, too powerful to be held without a struggle. Occasionally a bunch of willow brush flared brightly, and in the unburned stretches began licking along the ground. There was nothing yet that might be called a wind, only the steady draft up the side hill that sucked the smoke steadily through the pines.

Hogue was restless, sensing trouble and not knowing where it was to come. He walked constantly, seldom speaking. He knew his men resented him, and he found a kind of savage pleasure in their surly, tired stares.

He was standing alone on a slight rise in the trail when the first definite sign came that it was to be a bad day. He was watching the slope above him, hunting for some wisp of ground smoke to indicate a spot fire, when he heard the sibilant hiss behind him.

He turned to see a young fir tree explode in flames. There was no other word for it. One moment standing firm and green, the next instant it was a forty foot torch of flame, its pitch-filled needles burning as though they were soaked in gasoline. The sound of its burning came to him in a dull, air-sluicing roar. It was gone almost as quickly as it had come. The denuded tree stood nakedly alone.

Hogue watched the flight of burning foliage across the trail, watched a drifting piece settle in the pine grass and begin to burn.

He ran toward it and beat it out with his shovel. He waited a while and seeing no more, returned to the trail.

The fire had settled back into its monotonous pattern, but he knew this was the beginning. He could feel it in the increased tempo of the updraft, in the more avid way the blaze bit into the brush. Once he heard the momentary sigh of wind in the tree tops. He turned his head upward, staring long and thoughtfully.

The gust of wind did not come again. It had been like the sigh of a giant arousing from sleep and settling back for another forty winks. Hogue grunted softly to himself and went back down the trail.

"Fire!"

The cry came from behind him. He went back at a lumbering run. A spot fire had started in Congdon's beat, fifty yards up in the timber and, before Congdon had seen it, grown into something virulent, ten yards in diameter. When Hogue got there, three men were working on it.

Hogue attacked with fury, yet there was deliberate purpose in every move he made, no wasted motion. He used his feet as he used his hands, each step calculated and firm. The nails in his boots bit into the earth and left sharp cat-claws of pattern.

Once he got too near the fire. A gust of flame licked out at him, and he drew in a lungful of air as hot as the flame itself. For a moment he was incapable of breathing. He staggered back, his chest laboring. Then anger seized him and he smashed into the flame, beating it down in a sheer physical assault.

After that the spot fires came with increased frequency. Hogue was in on some of them, the worst ones. It was becoming hot now. He drank huge quantities of water and sweated profusely, the sweat running down his face, and glistening in dirty pools on the back of his hand as he wiped it away.

Manning came plodding up the trail leading his canteen-laden horse. He stopped by Hogue. Hogue looked him squarely in the eye, but Manning's eyes were blank. Hogue saw the incident of the morning was closed. He was relieved, because he had no wish for a quarrel with Manning. He drank deeply from the fresh canteen.

"God, that's good," he said. "That other stuff was getting stale." He wiped a dirty palm ceremoniously over the canteen's mouth, and offered it to Manning. Manning shook his head and Hogue set the canteen in the shade.

"When do we get some eats?" he asked Manning.

Manning's eyes squinted over the endless stretch of burn, and at the smoke sucking up the ridge into the virgin timber.

"What're you worrin' about eats, for?" he asked. "You'll be chased out of here by noon."

"Well, damn you, Manning," Hogue said. "We're going to hold it. You get some grub up here."

Manning shrugged. "Suit yourself. But be hanged if I'm coming back."

His opposition suddenly angered Hogue. "Why, you yellow-livered bastard, you're no better than the rest of these punks," he said, and saw Manning's face stiffen.

"Pretty good man, aren't you, Hogue?"

Hogue said, "Good enough," and waited for Manning to make another move. But Manning was too old and he knew it. He said nothing more, unloaded a couple of canteens, threw them to the ground at Hogue's feet, mounted his horse and turned back down the trail.

HOGUE stared after him for a moment. He knew he had gone too far with Manning, and for a moment wondered what was the matter with him. Then he shrugged it off, spat into the dirt, gathered up the water and turned toward the east end of his patrol.

He saw something now that he hadn't noticed before. Over in the east a cloud of black smoke was rolling into the sky. That meant someone had lost his trail and there would be another night's work before them. He cursed.

It took him an hour to reach the east end of his beat. Almost every man was battling an endless succession of spot fires. In the burn the snags crackled into new life, showering sparks over their heads. Down in the burn fire topped in a scraggly old pine and roared like an inferno a hundred feet above the ground.

Near the end of the patrol he found Hansen and the farmer, McIndless, leaning on their shovels.

"What the hell you doing here?" Hogue asked Hansen. He had assigned Hansen to the end position, and he should have been tending to it.

"It's too hot down there," Hansen said. "Gibbons' men are going to leave. I pulled out."

Hogue said, "Well." He said, "Well," again, hitching at his belt, lifting himself slightly on the balls of his feet. He saw realization come into Hansen's eyes, and he hit him, knocking him flat on his back. Hansen tried to get up and a fury seized Hogue over which he had no control. He kicked Hansen.

When Hansen lay still, Hogue got him by the shirt front, lifted him to his feet and shook him with one hand and slapped his face with the other. Hansen's head rocked and pain twisted his face. Hogue shoved him away. Hansen staggered but kept his balance.

"I'll tell you when to get out," Hogue said. "Now get back there and stay there!"

Hansen stared at him. There was something in Hansen's eyes that was neither fear nor respect, but a kind of loathing, and Hogue drew back his arm to hit him again. Then Hansen picked up his shovel.

"You've got a lousy thing for a soul, Hogue," Hansen said quietly. "Next time I come out of there, you'll come and get me. And I hope you burn doing it." He turned, went down into a small draw, around a twist in the trail, and out of sight.

Hogue turned on McIndless, saw the sullen anger in McIndless' eyes, stared at him until the man's eyes fell, then whirled and went back the way he had come. He was surprised at the intensity of his own emotion. He felt himself shaking and was so weak he stumbled

He had gone but a few hundred yards when he heard the wind in the tree tops again. This time there was no mistaking its purpose or intensity. It came with a soft roar, heard above the crackling of the fire, and continued with a steady insistence

Hogue watched a piece of moss break loose and fall in a smoking streamer across the trail. He ran toward it, beating it down with a cold fury. He smothered it and turned to find another bit of fire behind him.

All at once there were flaming patches all over the hillside. The smoke was clinging closer to the ground now and it choked him, causing the tears to run down

his face. For one blaze that he conquered, two flared into life.

It came to Hogue slowly that he was beaten. He stood on the hillside and cursed. He cursed the fire, the men, and the Forest Service. He started down toward the fire line and watched his men streaming past him. They were running with a wildness inspired by fear, and were oblivious of Hogue as they went by. Hogue could feel the heat rising up around him now, felt the suffocating choke of smoke in his lungs.

When McIndless went by, Hogue caught him by the arm and whirled him around. There was naked fear in McIndless' watery eyes.

"Where's Hansen?" Hogue demanded.

For a moment McIndless seemed to have trouble understanding what Hogue had said. Then he shook his head wildly. He couldn't seem to speak. Hogue threw him from him as if he were contaminated. McIndless ran on.

Hogue stood alone for a moment. His hands clenched and he drew a deep breath. "Let him burn," he said aloud. Then, when Hansen didn't show, "Damn such a job," and started running to the east. Once he had to detour around a place where the fire burned so close to the trail as to make it impassable. He went down through the draw and found Hansen beating at the flame on the other side.

He yelled and waved at Hansen to come out. He waited until the kid came close. Hansen's face was black with grime. His lip was cut and puffed where Hogue had hit him. "Why the hell haven't you got out of here?" Hogue demanded.

"I told you you'd come and get me," Hansen said. There was a stubborn and hostile pride in his eyes.

"You ignorant damn fool," Hogue said. He saw Hansen's eyes widen suddenly, looking beyond Hogue, and turned to see a flaming snag come slashing down into the brush-choked draw. Almost instantly the whole draw was a sheet of flame.

HOGUE started running uphill to circle the fire in the draw and get back on the trail. He had not gone far when he saw the whole hillside to the west of them was on fire.

"We'll have to go out the other way," he said. "This way is blocked."

Hansen's face was strained. "We can't," he said. "Gibbons left half an hour ago. The whole country's on fire over there by now."

Looking eastward, Hogue saw this was true. Smoke rolled up in huge yellow and black clouds, laced through with flame. Near the ground he saw fire crawling along faster than he could walk.

The shock seeped through Hogue slowly. They were trapped. He found it at first impossible to believe. Then he felt something warm at his feet, and looking down, saw the grass burning around his shoes and his overalls start to smoulder. Instinctively he started running.

He ran uphill, away from the body of flame, away from the heat. He ran, realizing dimly that he could never hope to outrace the fire. He heard Hansen behind him.

They reached the crest of the ridge, ran along the comparative open for a couple of hundred yards, then found themselves blocked by a wall of fire.

Hogue felt the fear begin to rise in him. It was a new emotion to him, and the fear itself began to frighten him more than the fire. He felt himself begin to tremble. He looked numbly at the shovel in his hand. They could run no further, for the valley beyond was choked by brush and already burning.

He looked up and saw Hansen watching him silently.

"You sniveling punk," he said. "If it wasn't for you I wouldn't be here." He cursed Hansen. He used every foul expression he had ever heard. The words came in a rushing stream of obscenity. During the tirade, Hansen's eyes did not change expression.

When Hogue, tiring, had stopped, Hansen spoke.

"You've got a black mark on your soul, haven't you, Hogue? It's festered and wouldn't let you rest, and now you're going to pay for it. I feel sorry for you, Hogue."

Beneath the grime, Hansen's face was pale and his mouth was pinched white at the corners. But after all the revilement, his eyes were steady on Hogue, and Hogue knew now why he hated him.

He hated Hansen because Hansen reminded him of Ben Dobson. Because Hansen had Ben's courage that went beyond pain and defeat. Hogue admitted his hatred now to himself and the power of his emotion tightened his hands on the shovel and it was as nothing in his hands.

He had been trying to kill Hansen as surely as he had killed Ben Dobson.

And now that he had admitted to himself what he had known all along, he grew gradually calm. The torment that had haunted him for years fell slowly away and his mind began to function again.

A pine crest roared into flame above them and the sparks came down and fired the grass at their feet. It began to grow unbearably hot.

Hogue looked down the slope of the hill into the maw of ground fire leaping up at them. Beyond the fire lay the trail. A man might dig in there in the old burn, away from the new flame. He had been a fool to run in the first place.

But first he would have to traverse the fire. Without Hansen he might make it. He had heavy clothes; Hansen had only oxfords and a chambray shirt. But Hogue knew he could not go without Hansen. He knew this now. It was why he had come in after Hansen in the first place. Without Hansen he could not face Manning or live with himself.

"Where's your shovel?" he demanded of Hansen.

"I threw it away."

"You fool." He told Hansen what they were going to do.

Hansen looked at the fire below. "I can't do it," he said. The sweat on his face was more than the heat of the fire, and his eyes had widened. Hogue saw that Hansen was going to break. The kid had gone as far as he could.

Hogue made a short side step and hit Hansen a calculated blow on the jaw. He caught Hansen as he fell. He wrapped his bandanna kerchief over Hansen's mouth and nose as protection against the heat, and threw his limp form over his shoulder in a fireman's carry. Holding his shovel in his free hand, he started running downhill toward the fire.

As he grew near the flame the heat became so intense he recoiled. But now he had no choice. He drew a deep breath and dodged around a burning willow and between two fir saplings that were beginning to blaze. The tongues of fire licked out at his face.

Once he waded through grass blazing as high as his waist. He held his breath, for one lungful of the air would finish him.

He didn't know how long it lasted or how far he had run. Once he fell and Hansen's head flopped around and Hogue saw that Hansen's eyebrows were burned away.

Then they were through the wall of new fire and the trail was haven beneath his feet. He drew a great gulping lungful of air then. He dropped Hansen to the ground and threw shovels full of dirt on his clothes. His own clothes were smouldering, and he stripped, stomping on them while the sparks stung his skin.

He was burned, how badly he did not know, but he could be no worse than Hansen, and he knew Hansen would live.

He set about digging a hole as shelter from the heat. Manning would come, when evening cooled the fire, looking without hope. Meanwhile he must protect Hansen. Hansen was valuable to him.

THE TRAIL AHEAD

Announcing a very special milepost coming up on the trail ahead . . . next month's ADVENTURE will be our—

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Adventure 25c

ON SALE OCTOBER 11th

THE ROMAN WAY

Lunden, they called it—a miserable little place with a wooden, palisade around it. But they scrapped for it like madmen!

EVERY man in the legions gets used to smells. It's part of his everyday life. There's the evening smells of the camp, for instance; sour sweat odor from a long march in the sun, the warm reek of cooking food, of garlic and cheese tinged with acrid wood smoke, and a whiff of the cavalry lines when the night wind veers round.

Fresh blood sopping the ground on a hard fought field has a salty tang that goes to the head like a draught of strong wine, and even the horses flare their nostrils out and squeal and jump. Next

A Tale of the Roman Legions

By

ROBERT ADDISON NICOLLS

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day it resembles the smell of stale flat lees in the bottom of a cheap tavern drinking cup, and the piled up bloated bodies spread a sickish sweet odor that makes a man retch in spite of himself. There's the smell of a burned and gutted town with its deep tinge of roasted flesh. A soldier's nose gets calloused in time.

But the Arena dungeons outstink 'em all. They're in a class by themselves.

Still, it's our bread and garlic now—Marcus' and mine. And a damn good job it is, this bossing the Arena gang. Easy in winter when the shows aren't on, but a ticklish piece of work when the big season starts. We run our gang on legion discipline; you've got to if you want to hang on in this business. Marcus is boss, just as though he were still centurion in the old Tenth, and me his *optio,* his second in command.

That's how it's always been. I guess that's how it'll always be; Marcus first, me second.

The old Tenth Legion was Caesar's favorite, and when I joined up as a raw young recruit in the first Gallic campaign I thought that I was great. All recruits are like that. Just put a bit of armor on a kid and weapons at his belt, and right away he gets to thinking he's a soldier. Besides, even a youngster in the Tenth felt he was better than a veteran in another unit. That bunch of women-chasing, sheep-stealing, wine-guzzling bluffers in the Sixth, for instance—

But Marcus took the freshness out of me in a hurry. He was an artist with the vinestock—the tough, willowy club of twisted grape roots that's a centurion's badge of office. My back was sore from my first hour in camp. His veteran's eye could spot the smallest fleck of rust on a cuirass, or a sword belt a hair's breadth out of place; and after drill he'd lay it on with every ounce of power in those great knotty shoulders until your whole world reeled around and the blood streamed down your back.

The older men would crowd about to see the fun, and jeer and laugh until they cried. You just gritted your teeth and hung on, praying to every god you knew that you wouldn't disgrace yourself. But you learned discipline. Hah! You learned it under the vinestock!

You hear a lot of oily slop these days about the greatness of the Roman arms, of modern methods, new military strategy and the like. Or listen to the gab of new-rich *equites* who've served like daredevils on some peaceful home front, stomping around in guilded mail that's never known a sword dent. Then it's all brave talk of weapons—the pila, the gladius—and this from a bunch of soft bellied slobs that couldn't even do a proper manual.

Father Zeus! It makes me want to spit!

I tell you Rome is great because of the vinestock, and centurions like Marcus who know how to use it! Hard but just. That's the combination for raw young lads fresh off the farm! That hardens them into Roman veterans! The Roman eagles fly on ahead, but under them the vinestock is the magic wand that points the way to victory.

It didn't take me long to get the hang of it. I liked the life, even with a perpetually raw back. And, vinestock or no vinestock, I liked Marcus.

So the first year passed. I was a veteran myself now, and had worn the coveted *corona civica,* the wreath of oak leaves for valor in battle.

What more could a man ask of the gods than to be a small part of the glory that is Rome?

THEN came the day of the ambuscade.

I'd reported that morning a split second late for roll call. Marcus just walked down the line until he was abreast of me, then bored those gray eagle's eyes of his into mine and snorted through his craggy nose.

"Call yourself a soldier, eh?" he snapped. I could feel my back muscles crawl already. "If we weren't in a rush I'd teach you now what an order means. Tonight's time enough, though!" He swung away.

"Form column!" he roared. "Hep! Stride it out!"

I could hear the rear files snickering as we slogged down through the main gate of the camp and across the ramp.

It was just a routine scout to some dumpy little Gaulish village or other. Maybe the place even had a name. Who

knows or cares? A muddy, rutty road track for a street, winding between a few miserable wattle and mud huts, and dirty refuse heaps.

We had scouts out, but the forest was tangled and thick all around and the Gauls jumped us front and rear before we had time to throw one pila. No room for formation. Just one smashing dog fight with every man for himself—short gladius against those long swinging swords of theirs and ten to one against us. We tried to form in the narrow road, Marcus roaring like a big dark devil in the van, and showers of darts biting at us from the cover of the tangled thickets over the heads of the tall Gaul swordsmen.

A blade licked out like a streak of fire over Marcus' helmet crest, and he went down with a roar choked, half uttered in his throat, a swarm of Gauls surging over him even as I jumped forward to his side. Still, over the long years, it's not all clear in my mind.

In camp it's hour after hour of grinding weapon drill. Up shield, cut, stab, guard and recover, while the sweat pours into your eyes and your sword arm aches. Over and over until you curse Rome and the army and the day you ever signed. But preparation for just such times as this. It's automatic, perfect. And it carried me through to Marcus' side; it held off the steel of the Gauls until help arrived and we lugged him back.

Our second in command was out with a dart through the chest, every decurion dead or wounded. Things looked bad. And then it was that I heard my own voice yelling orders. So help me, the rest obeyed! We formed the old flying wedge, shield to shield, cutting our way to a little hillock, and held 'em off until relief reached the place.

Marcus had a gash in the head you could lay a finger in, but he was a Roman, and a veteran centurion to boot. He came with the vinestock that night at evening roll call, voice cold steady, as though he hadn't lost enough blood to kill an ordinary man. And behind him stood Caesar himself and a group of his officers.

"Six paces front, Servius!" The old Marcus roar.

I took them, eyes front, back like a spear haft, but aching already.

"Strip!"

The ranks muttered just a little. He quelled the mutter with a glance.

"Late for morning roll call," he barked. "Unsoldierly! Ready?"

Hard but just. Vinestock discipline. By Zeus, the Roman way—the only way! I bit on my tongue as a precaution and the first blow whistled down. The blood began to trickle along my spine.

The last blow smacked, but I'd still kept my shoulders square. Then Marcus threw the blooded vinestock down and stood a pace in front with eye like chill gray steel under his bushy brows. His huge gnarled hand was on my shoulder, voice the staccato Roman military bark.

"For distinguished bravery — quick thinking in emergency—rescue of your commanding officer—high private Servius, *principalis* first class, promoted to *optio*—second in command of Fourth cohort—Caesar's Own Tenth Legion!"

The men were cheering. Even Caesar smiled as the red flag *vexillium* standard lowered to receive its wreath.

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Ho! The Roman way—Rome's greatness!

And what did it matter that a man's shirt was gummed already to his back by clotted blood?

From that time on it was Marcus and me; he first, me second. Centurion and *optio*. But all else was share and share alike.

THE first British campaign was a flop. Britain's a mystic, wind-swept land of mist and forest and tangled swamp, not worth Roman steel to the rank and file. But Caesar was Caesar. and at his word we'd have stormed the portals of Hades itself. So we went. But our force was small, the fleet got wrecked, and the Britons put up quite a scrap.

They're different from Gauls, but a funny race. Stain themselves blue with some dye or other—*woad* they call it—and fight mostly naked, except for a shield. Actually think it effeminate to wear armor. An impractical race that'll never amount to a plugged *obole*, but they can maneuver a two-horsed scythed chariot in a way that takes your breath. Pretty good fighting men at that, and every Roman who's matched steel with 'em 'll admit it.

But the second time we went over we went equipped to stay. We beat their chariot force at the first landing and then went inland up a broad, forest lined river to a town of theirs. Lunden, they called it; a miserable little place with a wooden palisade around it, the capital of some chief or other. Casswallon, I think his name was. A capital! Hah!

But they scrapped for it like madmen!

The reserve went in, yet still they held, and Caesar rallied our lines himself. The Britons led us on. They'd felled trees along the forest's edge about the town, and it broke up all formation. They cut Caesar off with a handful of the Sixth. All the Sixth is good for is dice and boozing anyway. But Marcus saw in the nick of time and took the old Fourth cohort in.

Caesar was hard pressed, using his blade like all the rest until they got his horse, and when they did the damn nag fell on top of him. It was Marcus then who interposed his shield, matching blow for blow with a tall helmeted Briton in gray wolfskins, who tried his best to get his steel in Caesar.

Marcus beat the Briton down, and then their line gave way. It was victory after that—as usual, with our own lines roaring on ahead under the eagles through the green, tangled woods. The Briton whom Marcus had beaten down was only stunned; he moaned and stirred. I yanked him to his feet.

"Your prisoner, centurion," I said. Slaves brought a good price with the army dealers in those days, and a man could salt away a nice retirement stake if he kept an eye peeled for just such things as this.

Meanwhile they'd pried the dead horse off Caesar and got him on his feet. Not hurt a bit. Mars *must* have been his sire! He was cool and calm and unruffled as though in his tent at camp, and stood for a minute looking us over as we clustered about. But you could tell just the same that his ears were weighing the battle sounds up ahead. He gave the prisoner a long, searching glance, and suddenly we saw him grin; that thin-lipped curving twist of the mouth that seemed always half a sneer.

"Aye," he said, "you've got something there, centurion!" And he knocked off the Briton's helm with a flip of his hand.

The long yellow hair cascaded down over the wolfskin cloak. Zeus! It was a woman!

I never went in much for barbarian women myself—too big and fleshy as a rule for my taste. But this one was different; young and slim and lithe, with wide gray eyes struggling between pride and fear.

Caesar was amused. You know what he was with a pretty wench. The Tenth used to have a bawdy song about it, telling all the husbands to lock up their wives when Caesar came. We'd roar it out slogging past him in review, and he'd sit his horse and grin like a satyr back at us. What a leader of men! May the gods curse the hands that struck him down.

Caesar looked at Marcus and licked his lips briefly with the tip of his tongue, while his eyes said "Give her to me!" Oh, he wanted her—bad. There was

Caesar reached under his corselet and brought out a golden plaque that hung about his neck.

something about this slim-bodied warrior-girl that made a man swallow hard and the blood race hot in his veins. Mystery? Sure! But that wasn't all. She had the thing that few women possess, the strange, subtle power that aches a man's body through only a glance, and we'd seen no women since the day the fleet left Gaul!

Another leader would have ordered her taken off to his tent before you had a chance to spit, and many's the time I've seen it done. Not Caesar! It was things like this that made him loved.

"Mine," said Marcus, as if in answer to that unspoken query in Caesar's glance, and there was a queer look in his own hard eyes.

Caesar shrugged. There were other women, and the battle line needed him up ahead. He reached under his corselet and brought out a golden plaque that hung about his neck—his good luck charm, two golden eagles worked in a curious scroll which rumor said had once belonged to the great Greek, Alexander. Without a quiver, he threw the chain over Marcus' head.

"Luck for a life, centurion," he said, and abruptly mounting another horse, was off to reform the lines.

That night I slept alone—aye, and for

many nights. For the whole time we stayed in Britain.

GLENDYWLYN, the girl's name was. She must have been a chieftain's daughter, though she never said. Marcus used her hard at first; nothing soft about Marcus. But though he never broke her spirit, she came in time to accept her lot with a sort of quiet dignity and reserve you could never seem to fathom. A hard man, Marcus, but a just man; and he was in love with her! Well, so was I. But she belonged to Marcus. I guess I drank more than my share of British mead the length of that campaign.

In all the years we've been together, before and since, I've never seen him look at a girl the way he'd look at her. There was a strange sort of gentleness to him after the first few weeks. Not that he wasn't a good hard soldier still, but he laid off the boozing and the dice, and he turned in his pay regularly to the regimental chest for safe keeping.

"Soldiering ain't all there is to life," he said one day out of a clear sky. We were in winter quarters then, and he's got himself a neat little hut in the village outside camp for Glendywlyn, and a broken down slave wench he'd picked up cheap, to help her with the cooking. I'd go there sometimes after evening roll call and inspection, and we'd sit around, just talking, cozy as you'd like. I used to catch their glances then, when they didn't think I saw. I knew now why she'd never tried to get away.

"No," said Marcus, "a man can't soldier all his life. With a little money now, and the right kind of woman, a veteran could set himself up for the rest of his years on a neat bit of farm land. Italy's the place! The Campaignia for choice."

"You'd leave the Tenth?" I gasped.

He gave Glendywlyn a long slow glance.

"Aye, maybe," he said shortly, and relapsed into silence, watching her fingers fly away with needle and thread at a bit of cloth.

I got away early somehow. And I got a he-man's drunk on that night. An *optio* don't get the vinestock, but I did special guard mount with full equipment for a week.

The girl was big with child when the news came in from Gaul. A new revolt. Zeus, but those Gauls were a stubborn lot! Let Caesar turn his back and up they flared again. Yet we were ready in two days' time. Caesar's way—like a lightning stroke in a storm!

Marcus summoned me an hour before we sailed.

"New orders just came in," he said. His lined, grim face never changed expression, but there was a look in his eyes that made your flesh creep.

I waited.

"No room for non-combatants," he said. "We leave everything behind."

He was a good soldier, but his face was bleak.

I nodded at Glendywlyn. "Can't you send for her later?"

"In all the mess we're headed for? When? Where?" He shook his head, then turned to the girl.

"You understand?" he asked.

"I understand," she said.

"What will you do?"

"Go back to my people."

"And the child?" asked Marcus.

But she only gave him a queer, half smiling look that a man couldn't hope to read. Just then the trumpets sounded.

He fumbled in his equipment roll and brought out a bag of coin.

"Here," he said, "take this. It may help you to forget."

The fool, the fool!

The girl's eyes flashed, and I thought for a space that she would cry; but she bit her lip and fought for control. The money bag scattered its contents on the ground under the sweep of her hand.

"Romans!" she said. Her whole face sneered.

It was the only time I ever saw Marcus lose his iron self-control. Grief wrenched his face, and shame, while his breath came hard.

And then the gods must have given him the happy thought! He pulled the golden plaque that had been Caesar's off his neck, looking her in the eye all the while, and slowly his fingers broke the thing in twain.

He held one of the golden eagles out to her.

"I won this when I won you, Glendy-

wlyn," he said. "Will you take it and remember?"

Gravely she took it from his hands.

"I accept," she said, "I and the child."

"Glendywlyn—" He was breathing like a spent man. "Glendywlyn—"

But she wouldn't touch him. She looked like she was afraid to touch him. She just smiled briefly, once, into his eyes—then, turning quickly, she was gone.

We never saw her again.

War in Gaul, the coup in Rome. Then Caesar's death, and after that the hard campaign against old wine-guzzling Anthony and his Egyptian light o' love.

WHEN we finally mustered out we got the Arena job on the strength of merit and political pull, and so we've lived ever since. Not a bad life, except for the smell, human and animal, that makes the whole place reek as nothing else on earth. We've a small house nearby, with an old hag to tend the cooking, and bossing the Arena gang gives us plenty to do. We run 'em, as I've said before, on legion discipline—you've got to, and hand pick the guards for good tough qualities.

In the off season we drop down sometimes to the Campus Marius and watch the young men exercise at the war games. Rome'll never need to worry; they're a good crop! But it makes Marcus wistful when he sees.

"If I'd a son," he'll say, "a Roman, to take his father's place in the old Tenth. A son," he'll say, and swing his grizzled lion's head toward the west. And I'll know his thoughts are ranging a thousand leagues over forest and tossing sea to Britain, back over the long years to the yellow-tressed girl and the child he'll never see.

But when he season's in full swing there's no time for that. You work under tension all the while.

Lions from Africa—the good old short-maned Numidian is an Arena standby. Wolves and wild dogs and leopards. Elephants, the meanest tuskers you can get. Tigers from India. We even had a rhinoceros this time too—a horned nosed brute that killed five good men before we got him transferred safe and sound in a special cage down in the animal pits.

Good gladiators come high, but it's no trouble at all, even now, to pick up all the war prisoners that you need. We start piling them in as soon as the season starts, and the last few weeks before the show the dungeons are packed. Then you just sit on top of trouble day after day, waiting for the blow-off.

Marcus came into the guard room the night before the games began and ripped his tunic open at the throat as he sat down.

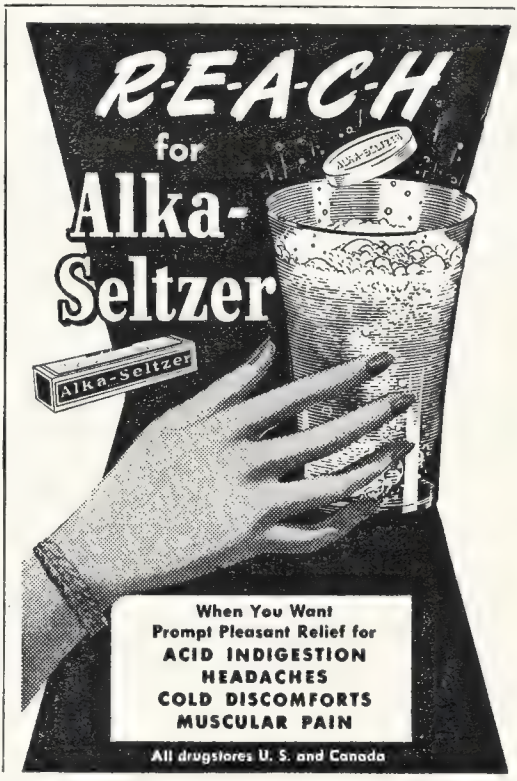
"Zeus, but it's hot tonight," he growled.

"Take it easy," I said, and pushed a full wine cup over the table top at him. "The show's on tomorrow. We're running on schedule. What more do you want?"

He grabbed a fistful of reports and shook the parchments under my nose.

"Change, change, and change again," he snarled. "In the name of Mars, why can't these asses be content to put up the money and let the experts run the show? That's what we're paid for!"

It made me grin. You know how it is. Each game's the same old story. Some big politician in need of votes scrapes



his money bags bare to put on a spectacle for the mob. It's got to be bigger and better than anything before. He's nervous; you can't blame him. If the games are a flop the mob'll curse him to his face, and their votes go elsewhere. So the experts are called in and the fun begins.

Just as fast as you think you've made out a good schedule, the giver wants it changed. He gets panicky. Try and change a thing yourself without permission and it's worth your job. Between all that worry, and trying to keep the animals and prisoners under control, you've got your hands full.

You hear a lot of talk nowadays about starved prisoners and graft from the food contracts. Maybe that goes for the provinces, but not in Rome. You can't fool the people who watch the games in the capital; they're for experts, and if you tried you'd be in for trouble. Our prisoners get good food, and good treatment too, when they aren't too crazy or stubborn to obey simple rules. It's our job to get 'em into the Arena fat and strong, and not crippled up or lacking fight.

Marcus hurled his emptied cup into a corner and shoved some reports at me to check; but suddenly we both were on the alert!

YOU get used to the Arena sounds just as you get used to the smell—a sort of low undertone of men's voices that rises muffled and restless under the mixed chorus of animal roars and snarls deep down in the dungeons below. The animals were loud tonight. We'd been starving 'em the last two weeks to get 'em in a temper. They ain't so dumb! I've always noted they seem to have some secret way of knowing when the long fast will end.

This time, though, it was something more. We were both half on our feet when the guard pounded in through the door.

There was blood on his torn tunic; blood poured from a section of scalp hanging soggily over one eye. We knew what had happened before he spoke, for the yelling came in plain through the open door; but Marcus waited for the report, measuring the man with a red, craggy browed stare that made him afraid to show panic. His salute was sloppy, but he'd regained full control.

"Prisoners loose, sir," he said. "Lower tier—cell fifteen!"

"You incompetent dogs!" Marcus was roaring. "The night before the games and you let a riot start. The whole damn crowd of you couldn't handle a one-legged hag with the itch!"

It wasn't so. They were good tough men!

"How many hurt?"

"Three guards dead, five hurt bad," the fellow said. "We're holdin' the passage. They ain't rushed us yet—too busy tryin' to open the other cells."

"Up to the main guardroom and give the alarm! Turn out every man!" roared Marcus. "Bring all the hot irons you can carry. Get goin'. On the run!"

Out in the corridor you could hear the yelling plain, deep down in the lower tier.

"Cell fifteen," said Marcus. "That'll be the batch of British war prisoners just in today. Mars' curse on 'em!" he snarled. "Why've they got to give us trouble on the very last night?" But he grinned like a wolf at me.

Generally you get a half score riots like this in spite of all the care you take. Just start penning up hundreds of half crazed, desperate men who know death's waiting presently out in the Arena, and you've got your work cut out. Have to watch 'em every minute! They try to open their wrists on the rough edges of their manacles, or take turns choking each other to death—anything to escape that Arena. When the guards go in to stop it, they're certain to get jumped unless there's plenty of red hot irons along, and then you fight a miniature war deep down under the earth in a screaming, bloody shambles. Kill or maim too many and the blame comes back on the Arena boss. It's hard on the guards!

Up to now, though, we'd had no riots at all, and the waiting had been bad. That's why we grinned. It was a relief to meet trouble long overdue and get it over with. So we went poking right ahead into the dim torchlit lower tiers with the whole reserve guard at our

In a slow contemptuous way, he stuck out a big, bare muscled arm and laid it on top of a red-hot iron.

heels, the hot irons glowing white, and slaves with the portable braziers heating more as we went along.

The corridor near cell fifteen was packed with a milling mob of half naked, long haired men—Britons, all right! I hadn't seen any in twenty years but a man don't forget men he's crossed steel with.

They were working hard at the locks on the other cells when we came in sight, and the screaming was so bad it near deafened you.

The array of glowing iron made 'em pause a bit, and the men in the other cells got fearful and stopped their noise, having had a taste of the irons before. But the Britons had the clubs of the guards they'd killed, and being men fresh in from the outside world were full of fight.

Marcus walked right out in front of us all.

"You scum," he roared, "get back to your cells or I'll burn the flesh clean off your lousy frames!"

He was speaking the Celtic tongue, and having a hard time after the long lapse of years. I could have done better myself, but bad as it was, they understood.

They milled a bit, not afraid, exactly—no Briton's afraid when he gets his mad up. Even a Roman'll give 'em that! But while they were still making up their minds whether to charge or take orders, a man stepped forward from their ranks. He was a giant of a man, and the shadowy light made his bulk even larger. He marched right up to Marcus.

THE guards in the front rank thrust out their long glowing irons to protect the old veteran from a sudden charge, but the Briton had no weapon. He just came close and stared at us with a keen, proud glance, then locked his eyes with Marcus. Then in a slow contemptuous way he stuck out a big, bare muscled arm and laid it on top of a red-hot iron. Never said a word; never changed expression. Just stood there matching glance for glance, while the silence was as strong as the yelling a moment before, and his cooking flesh sizzled like bacon on a spit. The stench drowned out the regular prison stink.

It was Marcus who made the first move. He struck the Briton's arm away from the iron. "Zeus!" he growled, "you should have been a Roman!"

The other's mouth twitched in a grim little smile, and as it did I suddenly saw that he was just a kid, fresh and fair-faced as the warrior class of Britons are; the down just on his cheeks, that were pink in the torchlight under the coat of prison dirt. Maybe I had looked so once when I first joined the legion. Maybe Marcus too—long ago.

"There are other brave men besides Romans," he said, and waited. There was a grim eagle's look in that eye of his that matched even Marcus at his best.

The old centurion gestured with his club at the mob from cell fifteen.

"You their leader?"

"Such as they have," said the boy.

Marcus was grim. "I ought to burn the hides off the lot of you," he growled, then grinned in spite of himself.

"Are they all like you?"

"Sure," said the youngster, and grinned right back. But his mouth was white with pain.

"Will they take your orders?"

"Aye."

"Then tell 'em," said Marcus, "to get back to their cell! You haven't a chance to fight your way out. You're here to die! Why not hale and whole and able to put up a scrap? Or do we drag you all out on the sands tomorrow too crippled to even walk?"

The kid frowned, but before he could answer, Marcus spoke again.

"A brave man," he said. He nodded toward the scarred arm. "That's why I've wasted this much talk! If they'll go back to the cell I'll send down wine enough for one good last drunk."

"On the level?" asked the kid.

"On the level," said Marcus.

The Britons took it like men! They grinned a lot and whooped at the guards. You've got to admire Britons. They trooped right back to the cell like lambs, but when the boy turned to follow, Marcus touched his shoulder.

"What's your name?"

"Cedric."

"Come up to the guardroom and get some oil on that arm."

Zeus! This from hard-bitten, grim, old Marcus! I couldn't believe my ears!

The kid shook his head. His face was set.

"I stick with my men," he muttered. Yet you could see he was all in.

"You're a prisoner," said Marcus. "You'll obey orders!"

The boy still looked stubborn. Marcus tapped him on the back.

"I'll see you rejoin your men in time," he growled. That settled it.

The kid talked briefly through the grated doors, where slaves were already welding the new locks on, and the Britons yelled for him to enjoy himself, and loudly demanded the promised wine on the run.

So we went up again to the guardroom through the long corridors that were silent now, save for the groaning here and there, and the animal noises that had strung up again, savage and restless, with a low, deep, hungry undertone of lion roars, and the battering smash of the rhinoceros trying to work out of his cage. We'd been touching him up now and then with hot irons to put him in a meaner humor.

Cedric was a handsome lad. I've no sympathy with barbarians, fools standing in the way of Roman might and law. Don't want to be civilized. But there was something about this fellow that drew you in spite of yourself.

He sprawled out on a bench before the guardroom table, resting his back against the stone wall, and looked the two of us over with a kind of slow, dignified in-

terest, just as though *he* were a Roman, and we a couple of prisoners. Oh, he had guts and dignity! Coming from a barbarian, though, it got a bit under the skin.

Marcus yelled for wine, and when it came the boy drank deep. He'd begun to pale out a little around the gills, but the drink brought the color back under the down on his cheeks, and when a slave got some oil on that burned arm and a clean bandage over it, the Briton perked up.

Marcus stared at him a long time. What thoughts lay masked behind those hard, scarred features only Zeus knew. Yet I could guess, because I think they were like my own.

This kid was a fighting man, descended from fighting stock.

I'VE seen men die screaming by the thousands in war, under the torture, in the Arena; and I know that a really brave man's a rare animal. Doesn't take much guts to die with a sword in your hand and the heat of battle driving you on. But when a man's known the dim walls of the dungeons closing about him, when he's listened to the roaring of the hungry beasts; when he knows he's trapped and the only way out's to the Arena sands and death, it seems to melt the marrow in their bones. They're apt to scream or yell or moan with crazy fear. The waiting, the uncertainty sort of breaks 'em down. They whimper and beg. Phaugh! It turns your stomach.

But this fellow! To let the filthy beasts tear at one like this!

Finally Marcus spoke.

"We served in Britain." He jerked a thumb at me. "Together," he said, "under Caesar."

"Aye?" said the kid. His lip curled. "Britain was a fair land before you Romans came."

"The march of civilization," said Marcus. "We bring the fruits of Roman progress to you. The Roman mission, the Roman way—the only way!" The pride of it was in his voice.

"The Roman way!" The kid's voice cracked. "Death and destruction! That's the progress of Rome. Gutted towns that once held peaceful homes. Dead men piled rotting in the weed-grown fields, with the ravens glutting themselves fat on human flesh. The wails of helpless women and children carried off by filthy dealers in slaves." He spat. "That for your Roman way!"

Marcus' face grew harder.

"Because you backward peoples resist," he snapped. "*Vae Victis*—woe to the conquered! Submission or steel, that's Rome's way!" He banged his fist down on the table boards until the wine cups jumped.

But it was as if the kid hadn't heard him.

He'd thrown back his head, and the light in his eyes held a faraway look that transfigured his face. I'd seen that same expression on the faces of Druids when we burned them in their own wicker cages in Gaul. The look of a dreamer, a prophet—impractical, a wild soft spot inside. All Britons have the streak. That's why they'll never amount to much. They lack the good hard common sense that's made Rome what she is—mistress of the world until the end of time!

"Britain," Cedric whispered. "Britain —" His thrown-back face glowed with that inner light. "High cliffs and the roaring sea. Green fields and fallow under the misty sun, and ravens cawing in the woods. A land of happiness and warriors and brave deeds. A land of freedom and a land worth dying for!"

With eyes half closed he began to chant as though in prophecy, while the veins in his forehead pulsed with a rush of blood.

"War and steel and fire over a harried land; the tramp of Roman feet, and after them more war, and more, and the shoutings of strange war-cries. Yet in the end, greatness and happiness and peace —and the name of Britain on every tongue, and the name of Rome but a memory."

For minutes he sat there looking off into space. You could sense that the shell of the man remained, but his spirit was away to some far place, beyond the stone walls of the room. I've heard the Druids chant so when death approached. It shakes a man a little—a thing that steel and good reason can't quite com-

bat. Glendywlyn had had it too. But pshaw, what a foolish waste of words. Rome but a memory! Hah!

Slowly the youngster opened his eyes and looked about.

Unconsciously Marcus' hand was playing with the half of the golden plaque on its chain about his throat. He often touched it thus, and when he did I knew his thoughts were belying the hard weathered mask of a face. The boy, his talk of Britain, had swerved my centurion's mind back over the long years, back to another time and place, and the memories that haunted them. He frowned, twisting the chain as he ruminated, and the plaque lay soft and yellow under his fingers in the open V of the tunic against the hairy chest. The Britain's eyes glittered as he watched. Pshaw! All barbarians covet gold, and he was no exception!

"I knew Britain," Marcus said, and the harsh, grating bark in his voice had stilled. He looked at the boy. "A brave man," he said grudgingly. "Almost like a Roman." His shrewd glance bored into Cedric's eyes.

"Would you live?" he asked suddenly.

My heart leaped a bit. He'd the power to pull strings even at this late hour. The streets outside were already astir in the early dawn. People had begun to jam in ahead for good places, though the games wouldn't start for hours.

The Briton's face flushed; he drew a long breath.

"Free man or slave?"

"Free," said Marcus, "if you stay in Rome! I'll hold you back, buy you," he said, "then manumit you." His hard mouth twisted under some inner pressure; he hesitated. "Kid, you're a good tough one. We could use you here on the Arena gang."

This to a barbarian! This from hard-boiled old Marcus!

"My men?" asked Cedric quickly. There was a catch in his throat.

Marcus snorted like a bull.

"Must I buy all Britain?" he snarled. "They're part of the show, nothing to me!"

"They're Britons," said the kid quietly, but his voice snapped hard, like a taut bow string.

Marcus shrugged. "Barbarian scum!"

Cedric's mouth formed in a hard, thin line. He gave Marcus glance for glance. "They're my men and my countrymen. I go where they go!"

Marcus nodded his craggy old head in grim approval, just as though he must have known all along it would be like this. He lowered his eyelids, drumming the table top hard with his fingertips, and whistling low and tonelessly between his teeth.

"All right," he said finally, "you'd better get back to your cell." He yelled for the guard.

"But first," he said, "we'll have one last drink." He eyed the kid over from head to toe. "You look like a rag-picker! Clean him up," he ordered the slave who was pouring the wine. "Over there in the corner will do. Rip those filthy rags off him and get him a fresh tunic."

Cedric submitted quietly.

By the gods he was good to look at when he'd been scrubbed down and dressed. He'd a pair of shoulders on him, wide and sloping and coiled with rippling muscle. The shoulders of a swordsman. What a waste—what a waste of strong young flesh!

MARCUS stood up and handed him a full wine cup. The kid looked at us both for the space of a hundred heart beats, not saying a word, while the chill gray light from outside struck in through the barred windows.

My centurion raised his cup.

"A toast," he said. He grinned his hard sardonic grin. "To Rome!"

"To fair Britain of the wind-swept cliffs," said the kid, "and damnation to all that's Rome!" He quaffed the wine and dashed the lees full into Marcus' face.

The latter never moved; his rocky features never changed.

"You should have been a Roman," he said simply, but the boy only laughed and followed the guard out through the door.

We both sat down again, but we didn't speak. There was work to do—reports and last minute checks to make, yet still we didn't move. Somehow my senses felt drugged and numb.

The slave moved about picking up the bloody rags that had been Cedric's clothes. When he did something fell out of the folds and hit the floor with a metallic rattle. He stooped like lightning to retrieve it, but Marcus shot out a foot and sent the fellow spinning.

"Hold on," Marcus said. "Pay's poor enough around here, for the likes of you to cut in on the extras."

The object had fallen close to my feet. It was gold, all right, some carved thing or other, yet when I bent to pick it up I felt a cold chill down my spine. I'd rather have faced a flying wedge of Gallic swordsmen with bare hands than to have lifted it above the table's edge.

Marcus' voice was amused.

"Heave it up," he said. "After all these years of sharing our luck, will you start holding out on me now?"

He was grinning still, but when the thing dropped on the boards in front of him, his mouth clamped tight.

The color drained from his face until the skin was gray, and the scars on his cheeks stood out like fresh, livid cuts. He was already fumbling at his breast. It seemed to take him a long, long time to bring out the half of the golden plaque. He gave the chain an impatient tug, and it snapped in a shower of glittering links. His fingers shook as he placed the plaque down beside the object that had lain in the dirty folds of Cedric's garment.

The centurion's hands moved the pieces slowly. You could see he was hoping they wouldn't somehow fit, those two broken double eagles. He brought their edges toward each other with infinite care, and he seemed to be half in a trance. There was no need for me to lean forward to see. The edges melted into each other. The golden eagles were together again!

For a long time he brooded over them.

THE Arena was alive with sound. Far above us the roar of the mob packing into their seats seeped faintly down, like the roar of surf on a rocky shore. Maybe the shore of Britain. Weapons clanged in the corridors, and the animals moaned hungrily. That devil of a rhinoceros still beat at his cage with dull, battering blows. I had looked forward to seeing him in action out on the packed sunlit sands, yet I knew I had no stomach now to see him so today.

Finally Marcus pushed the golden plaque away from him in an almost gentle gesture, but when his glance locked mine it was steady, with thin lips curved in a hard, proud smile.

"So," he said softly, "a Roman after all!"

"You could hold him back, appeal to Caesar!"

He only shrugged.

Then I remembered. "He would stand with his men," I muttered.

"Aye," said Marcus, and his voice was full of a harsh, grim pride.

He cleared his throat and picked up some reports, yet I knew he was only pretending to read. When he finally spoke he didn't look up, but his steady voice had the ring of command as in the old days on campaign.

"Optio!"

He had never used my military title since the day we left the legion, nor had I. But now I answered him in kind.

"Centurion?"

"This matter of the British prisoners. They were marked down, I see, to go bare-handed against lions."

"Aye."

"An oversight!" His voice rang. "The schedule is changed! They go out with shields and swords! Break out those Thracian blades from the reserve storeroom! They're a good heavy weapon. See to it! On the run!"

So his son was to die like a fighting man after all—steel against fang and claw—and not like a gutted sheep.

I knew that there'd be trouble for this. Maybe our job would go. And we were old.

Still, I could have hugged his broad, gnarled shoulders; but I went to the door instead.

"Centurion?"

His steely eyes glared up at me.

"Well?" he snapped.

"Shall I stay on and watch?"

"Aye, stay on. I shall want a report on the death of the British prisoners." He grinned crookedly. *"Vae Victis,"* he said. "The Roman way!"

I went on down the corridor and out.

ILLUSTRATED BY
FRANK KRAMER

THE MOST

A FACT STORY

By
BOB YOUNG

LOW-DOWN MAN

SHORTY Harris had the knack of doing things in a grand manner, even if he wasn't always aware of it.

For instance, when he came to California during 1877, Shorty arrived with U. S. Grant. Of course, the noted Union Army general was riding in the luxury of a private car while Shorty precariously balanced himself on the brake beams below.

And at first California was not too hospitable to the man that would later uncover more than $15,000,000 in gold treasure, and leave this earthly sphere only to be buried standing up.

Frank Harris was born in Rhode Island, July 21, 1857. When he was seven, his parents died, and he was cared for by a poverty-ridden aunt and a kindly priest. He struck out for himself when he was eleven. The wanderlust was upon him even then, and Shorty meandered along

The Indian indicated he wanted to buy the Model T and asked the price. "Ten dollars," Shorty told him.

the trail West, winding up in Yuma, Arizona just as the Presidential Special of General Grant was being received.

Shorty listened for a few minutes to the remarks being made by the General. His interest soon waned, and he pushed his way out of the crowd. When the Special pulled out for Los Angeles, Shorty was smiling again as he watched the ground slip from under his position on the brake beams.

EITHER Los Angeles didn't interest Shorty, or the other way 'round as he left for Colorado pronto. His first mining experience was gained there—making five dollars a day mucking. A sum which he soon learned was extremely easy to be quit of by drinking and gambling; he never learned either art very well. But when he was in the chips, champagne was no extravagance to him.

When the Colorado episode ended, Shorty shoved off for Montana and Idaho, and gradually wandered his way down to the desert country. It was about this time, Shorty, now considered a drunken derelict, began referring to himself as "the short man." And with good reason. He stood one inch short of five feet, and weighed about a hundred pounds, dressed for work. He was of the live and let-live school, and happily wasted his time between mines and bars.

The stories of lost mines, horn silver, and free gold deposits around the Death Valley and Panamint mountain areas intrigued Shorty. "That's the place for me," Shorty said as he swung up on a west bound train again.

He peeled spuds for a few days after he arrived to satisfy the inner man, but the urge to wander made him quit the job.

"It's no low-grade for me," Shorty was telling his friend John Lambert, as they looked over the reaches of Death Valley. "I want a lallapalooza or nothing."

Lambert nodded. Shorty was always talking that way. He'd watched Shorty wander around various camps for years, telling great stories but with no real strike, yet Shorty still stuck to his guns of a big strike or nothing.

"Lemme borree your shovel, will you, John?" Shorty was asking. "I'm going out and look around a mite."

Lambert let him have the shovel, an old blanket, then finally threw in his old burro. Lambert looked again at the desert, then decided to go with Shorty. It was a lucky thing he did.

Before five o'clock that March 17, 1892, afternoon, they located a tremendous vein of gold. Shorty was jubilant and made off for Ballarat as fast as he and the burro, now dubbed Delilah, could make it.

Shorty was voluble after a few drinks, and was telling the whole camp of his find. He referred to the site as the St. Patrick mine in honor of day it was located.

Shorty proved his claim up, and immediately found a buyer for his half. He got $7,000, but Lambert held out for a year, and sold his interest for a reported $160,000.

But Shorty made his count.

For seven weeks Ballarat rocked. Shorty was host for anyone that would open a bottle with him, and enjoy the party. He didn't even bother to rent a place to sleep. He and Delilah made their quarters in an abandoned school house. Shorty reasoned that way there was more money to spend on desert tangle foot and the girls.

At the rate of $1,000 per week, Shorty soon saw the bottom of his first big poke. Happily he put his shovel and blanket on Delilah and vanished into the desert. With him this time was Jim Dayton, beside whom he lies today.

The pair circled back into the Funeral mountains and located another claim, again obviously worth millions.

Shorty was pretty proud of himself now. He just could not miss when it came to hunting gold. Shorty quickly forgot about the years he had spent wandering and wasting.

Shorty insisted they return to town at once. This strike was too good to celebrate sitting up on a hill. He had to have a drink.

Shorty hadn't learned his lesson yet. After a few hearty pulls at the bottle, his tongue began wagging.

"I've found another lallapalooza," he was saying. Jim Dayton was trying desperately to laugh it off, claiming the reason

they were back in town was that Shorty was "teched" with the heat. But Shorty persisted. The crowd gathered and began to pry from him the location of the bonanza.

Shorty suddenly found himself accompanied only by the half-filled bottle. The Goldrock Saloon was emptied of everyone, including the bartender. Shorty babbled something about this is a fine way to treat the short man who made this country rich. But Shorty found the pain of loneliness declining as he helped himself from the ample bottled wares behind the bar.

Foggily shaking his head the next morning, Shorty realized what he had done. He'd made the strike, and hadn't even filed a claim before shooting off his mouth.

"That drunk cost me a million dollars," Shorty wailed.

He was philosophical about it, and walked off towards the blacksmith's shop to put an edge on his mining picks. It was there he had met months before the Belle of Ballarat: Miss Bessie Hart.

SHORTY'S observation of her, when he saw Bessie pumping the bellows, and fashioning a horseshoe, was ". . . one fine woman (as they come and go)." Shorty looked up at her from his five foot stance into the clear eyes more than a foot above him. This magnificent height was well proportioned with 210 pounds of brawn. Shorty had been in love with this desert Juno for a long time before he recognized the symptoms. He had liked girls from Virginia City to Tombstone, but he had never felt true love before. His other romances were referred to as ". . . them other affairs, they was—well, the kind of thing that can happen to any gentleman . . ."

But Bessie was different.

As she pumped the bellows, Cupid picked him off in mid-air. Shorty popped the question, "Why don't I and you get married?"

Sweat ran down her handsome face, as she looked down on her little admirer. Her big hands were placed on ample hips.

"Shorty," she replied, "you're a first class miner, a first class little friend, and I like to have you around. But as my husband, you're just too little for a damn big job."

Shorty gulped, and led his one faithful female, Delilah, off into the desert again.

Hardships of desert travel never seemed to affect him as badly as the lush life of his sprees. He could survive on little food and bad water. One of the few times he was ill, someone administered two large doses of liniment to him by mistake, but the next morning Shorty turned up chipper as ever. It must have been the right medicine.

Strangers often asked him how he managed to survive the privations and dangers of the desert when alone. What equipment was necessary for his long trips into Death Valley?

"A deck of cards," Shorty would tell them.

"Surely sir, you can't be serious," the newcomer might say. "How would cards help you?"

"I've found that no matter where I wander, or if I am lost," Shorty would begin, "if I just sit down and start to playing solitaire some dang-blasted kibitzer will come along in five minutes and tell me to put that red queen on the black king."

Generally there were no more questions asked.

In 1904, Shorty and E. L. Cross were camping in the Bullfrog Hills, while on their way to Tonopah, Nevada. Cross was cooking breakfast, and he asked Shorty to round up their strayed burros.

"I'll just take my pick along," Shorty told him as he started off over the hill. He looked for sign of float, indicating a ledge in the vicinity. Shorty stopped to wipe the sweat from his face, sticking his pick in a green-glassy looking outcropping. He stopped wiping when he saw the free gold in the rock, shaped like a little frog.

"Ed, Ed, this is it," he hollered. Shorty was whistling back towards camp. "This'll be one spot in Nevada that will be remembered." Cross agreed when he saw the specimen Shorty held out. He inspected the ledge and again agreed. When they melted the ore down that night, they knew they were rich. With the claim monuments set, Cross and Shorty took off to record the claim.

WHEN Shorty was again ensconced in a Tonopah tavern, and telling all of the boys of the find, one of the oddest gold rushes in the West started.

"Why, I saw one man cry because no one would sell him a burro for $500," Shorty related. He watched the miners start on the 75 mile hike with a wheelbarrow, a cart, or anything that would cart away the ore. In a week more than a thousand men had camped around the site of Shorty's claim now called Rhyolite, rather than Bullfrog as he had named it. Several million dollars were taken out of the ground there in a short time.

Shorty's thirst was great and offers got better and better to purchase his share in the mine. He held out for a week. Then one night he got more of the "O Be Joyful" juice than usual. The next morning he woke up to find a bill of sale for his share of the mine for $25,000. Shorty knew he had been beat again, but his signature on the copy was notarized and witnessed. He was out of the mining business again.

Ed Cross was shrewder. He got $125,000.

The Rhyolite diggings produced more than $7,000,000.

But Shorty's friends gathered around him again in Tonopah. It seemed there were myriads of friends whenever he was flush after a find.

"Set 'em up for the house again," Shorty would say, then lay down a couple of double eagles. The few coins in change he would throw to the girls of easy virtue lurking on the edges of the crowd. Shorty didn't have any use for women since he was repulsed by Bessie.

With a bankroll still hovering around $7,000, Shorty decided it was time to pull up stakes again. Shorty set his glass down with finality.

"You know, boys," he said, "the last time I was out in the valley, Delilah complained of a toothache. She wouldn't eat anythin'—not even flapjacks. I tried to treat her but no use. She jawed all day."

The crowd was gathering now to hear Shorty talk.

"That night she wandered away. The next mawning, she came back all smiles. I looked into her mouth, and there—" Shorty paused for emphasis, "There was that tooth filled completely with gold. Delilah had gone out and gnawed off'n some ledge to fill that tooth. And now I'm going back to find that ledge."

Shorty strode from the bar, untied his burro, and walked off into the desert.

Of course Shorty didn't find the ledge he imagined, but he did locate another ledge on July 4, 1905. This one was not of the quality of Rhyolite, but he did manage $10,000 in cash and some shares of the stock issued by the new owners. This was too much for Shorty Harris. He already had a bank account, and had more money coming. Apparently the West wasn't big enough for him to get rid of his money, so Shorty boarded a train for the East. This time he was riding in style.

Shorty scattered coin in Kansas City, Chicago, New York, and Philadelphia. Nothing was too good for him when he was flush, and he made two trips, so's he was sure he would get rid of most of it.

Shorty basked in the adulation of miners who considered him the sage of Death Valley mining. Tyros would come to him and ask him advice about where to hunt. Shorty would ask where they were prospecting. "Bones Valley" one would say. Shorty would draw himself to full height and wisely proclaim: "Nope, no gold there." The prospector would leave disheartened, but sure. He had heard it from the master. Another would ask: "How about the Chocolate Mountains?" And Shorty, in a different mood, would agree there was stuff there. The questioner would go back, full of enthusiasm, and dig like mad.

Shorty loved it. He didn't give his opinion to harm anyone, but felt it was his station to inform.

During his trips East, the company that formed following his last strike, now called Harrisburg, levied an assessment aginst the stockholders for improvement purposes. Shorty couldn't meet his, and his stock was forfeited.

Shorty swore it was "—just a damn blasted freezeout game to swindle the poor prospector out of his own, so that some city slicker who sat in a bank, and hadn't seen no gold-bearing quartz blowout in his life, could fenagle all the money."

And Shorty lost the Midas touch. The desert was becoming crowded according to his lights. Someone gave him a Model T, for which he could find no visible use, after a trial into the desert sands. It caused him no end of trouble, but he couldn't find anyone who wanted it. He couldn't give it away either. One day his burros strayed. Later on an Indian appeared who told Shorty: "Can findum burros for ten dollars."

Shorty looked at him, knowing that the Indian had led the animals away in hopes of snagging the white man for a reward. But Shorty agreed immediately.

The Indian brought the burros back to him. Shorty handed him the ten dollars. At the same time he mentioned he had a Model T he would like to sell. The Indian indicated he wanted to buy, and asked the price.

"Ten dollars," Shorty told him.

THE Indian clinched the deal. Thus Shorty had his burros back, along with his ten dollars, and was quit of that accursed Model T. He may not have been shrewd where thousands were involved, but for a barter he was unbeatable.

Years dragged by for Shorty. He found refuge in the old Ballarat school house where many years before he and Delilah had quartered while throwing away $7,000. This was home to him again. He found a job with a road maintenance crew to make his coffee and beans. Shorty was happy though he could no longer roam as before. The weakness of the flesh was upon him.

An old friend repaid $5,000 that Shorty had lent him years before. Shorty treated the town again for as long as it lasted. That was his last full-scale jamboree.

Still muttering to himself, ". . . Someday the short man is a-gonna make the biggest strike of his life," he turned over in his single blanket bed on the school room floor, and died.

Shorty was seventy-seven and the year was 1934.

Word spread rapidly of Shorty's death. He had gained an international reputation and despite the parasites he had treated during the years, there were many genuine friends of the short man.

Dry-eyed, sober, and sombre desert rats assembled at the foot of Hanaupah Canyon in the very bottom of Death Valley, 280 feet below sea level. When the casket was brought forth for burying someone noticed the gravediggers had planned for Shorty's grave based on his life-size measurements: about five feet. Here Shorty was laying in a box, full size, some six feet long.

Furnace-like winds were blowing down on the mourners, and the sun was pitiless. Working under such heat was indeed no pleasure. A hasty consultation was held, and a decision reached.

"Dig a little deeper at one end, enough to be able to cover it up, then put the casket in."

A few spadefuls of sand were scraped out and the casket crammed in. It would only slide in to a very sharply slanted angle. But it got the job done, and they dusted off their hands knowing that Shorty would be content, even though he might get tired of standing up through all eternity.

In later years, the Pacific Borax Company erected a monument over Shorty Harris. The marker, made of stone and cement, has the plaque affixed bearing Shorty's last request:

"Bury me beside Jim Dayton in the valley we loved. Above me write: 'Here lies Shorty (Frank) Harris, a single blanket jackass prospector.' Epitaph requested by Shorty Harris, beloved gold hunter, 1856-1934. Here, Jas. Dayton, pioneer, perished, 1898. To these trailmakers whose courage matched the dangers of the land, this bit of land is dedicated forever."

Despite the noble motive in erecting this headstone, two of the dates are wrong. Dayton died in 1899, and Shorty was born in 1857, but the two men have never complained.

By design the desert rat gravediggers buried Shorty a little deeper than Dayton, and by the same token Shorty's grave, 280 feet below sea level, is the deepest grave in North America, or perhaps the world. This was done so's Shorty could on Judgment Day arise and say:

"I am the most low-down man in the world."

Shorty Harris would like that.

THE MAJOR

A Vignette of World War II

By

ROBERT ELLIOT

"Don't bother me with prisoners," the major said. "Get them the hell out of here!"

DRIFTING skeins of gray smoke filtered the hot August sunshine that blazed out of cloudless skies over the village. Staccato waves of sound echoed back and forth between the dust-covered quaking walls of the houses and out-buildings.

Bent figures in khaki stumbled wearily, yet cautiously, through the twisting lanes and byways, hunching against the shriek and wail of shells and the hard clatter of machine guns. The slap and crack of splinters and spent bullets rattled above the concentrated roar of the field artillery

ILLUSTRATED BY ROGER L. THOMAS

batteries. Packs bobbed loosely as the files wound their way over the piles of debris and around the still smoldering craters. A street of houses flared and crackled, belching clouds of grayish smoke upwards, targeting the village perfectly for the enemy gunners. A dispatch rider rode the stirrups of his bike, snaking his way through the rubble, the exhaust of his cycle spluttering as he cautiously gunned it in the few clear spaces.

THE CELLAR was dim, and crowded with unwashed bodies, and the candles flickered as the waves of concussion banged through the blasted doorway.

Midafternoon, with a blazing sun overhead, and the candles burned in the dim coolness of the underground room. The major, massive in mud-streaked battle-dress, hunched behind a pile of compo ration cases studying the map before him. Across the room a group of three officers stood in conversation with two corporals. They were back for a few hours' rest from the seething hell up forward and now they were waiting to go up again with the night ration parties.

A brief warning shriek sent them to their knees as the shell burst outside their cellar and the fragments howled across the room on the floor above. The sharp fumes of explosive sifted down into the cellar and the men coughed and gagged.

The major scowled as he traced the position of his company on the map and read the few hastily scrawled messages his captains and lieutenants had sent back. The company was holed up in a little orchard, digging in frantically while the 88's smashed in. He fidgeted and swore under his breath as he could see their position in his mind.

The men were digging in under shelling, their dead and wounded scattered under the shredded trees. Rifles, Brens and Stens lay unused as the men burrowed frantically. Many of them were hard-rock miners from the gold fields of upper Alberta and Saskatchewan, but they had never dug faster, or with more frantic purpose, than they did in that mangled orchard.

The red and white cloth crowns, marking his rank, on the major's shoulders were scuffed and soiled. Those one-inch symbols of his majority held in their battered forms the responsibility of over a hundred lives. Lives entrusted to his personal care; and he dreaded each time his company went into action. The casualty reports were like blood from his own body. He was a man who held his rank with the full knowledge of its liabilities and dangers as well as its few privileges. He had led his men into action until his third wound, and then the Old Man had stepped in and ordered him out of it. He was too valuable to lose to some Jerry with a Schmeisser.

The gasping runner dodged-down the steep stone stairway as the major was nervously lighting a fresh cigarette from the smoldering butt in his lips. The man trampled to a halt in front of the crude table and thrust a crumpled message form into the major's face. His steel helmet was pushed back on his head and streams of sweat coursed muddy rivulets down his unshaven face. The Mk. IV rifle slung across his back was dirty, and the six inch spike bayonet, rusty. At his hip flapped an open holster, the curved butt of an officer's pistol shiny with use showing from the fabric. He lit a cigarette and inhaled deeply as the major read the smeary penciled lines on the message form. Glancing around with the practiced eye of the man who learns through bitter necessity, the runner noted that the ground level windows were heavily blocked by rubble; the Bren sitting on the floor near the major, ready for use.

The major looked up quickly at the still panting sergeant, noted his wide staring eyes, tensed muscles, and saw the man was listening with his eyes as well as his ears to the sounds that raged overhead. As he scribbled an answer to the message, the major shoved an enameled mug towards the sergeant. The man gratefully drank the stinging whiskey. Then he sighed audibly and set the empty mug down and stuffed the message into his tunic pocket.

A final glance that spoke volumes of his desire to remain, and he clattered up the stairs into the shellburst that arrived unheralded by howl or whistle.

The mangled body flopped loosely backwards down the stairs, rifle and

helmet banging on the fieldstone steps. The major jumped to his feet, eyes burning, a hoarse curse on his twisted lips, face livid. He stooped beside the crumpled figure of the sergeant. Stone dead, his chest torn open.

The officers and men in the cellar crowded around the dead man and stared at him. It was not the first time any of them had seen death in one or more of its grotesque forms, yet the ugly scene held them spellbound and they gaped at the body sprawling at their feet.

Stretcher bearers answered the major's shrill yell and they struggled up the stairs with the body. With an effort, the major controlled his senses and slumped suddenly onto the ration case and poured neat whiskey into the mug that had so recently been used by the sergeant.

A flurry of furious sound slammed into the cellar and the men ducked. The major crouched, hand on his pistol, watching the rolling clouds of smoke that eddied about the entrance. A corporal dashed up the stairs, rifle at the ready, and disappeared into the inferno. In seconds he was back, shouting hoarsely that Jerries were in the streets.

Scooping up the Bren as he dashed for the door, the major sprinted up the steps, jerking the cocking handle as he burst into the open. Behind him came the three officers and the other corporal, who clutched a grenade in each hand. For a split second they stood there, undecided, then the major darted down the street, calling for the others to follow him.

He seemed huge and ungainly as he pounded over the cobbled street, hobnailed boots crashing. Actually, he was amazingly light on his feet.

As he rounded a corner he came to a halt, swinging the Bren from his hip and squirting a racketing stream of lead at the scattered band of field gray figures that scurried for cover at the sight of him. The grenade-armed corporal heaved mightily, grunting with the effort, and they flung themselves on the stones waiting for the blast.

Later, exhausted and spent, they straggled into the cellar again and sat glumly on the floor, automatically reloading rifles and revolvers. The major slammed a fresh magazine on the Bren and sank wearily to his box seat.

A smoking cigarette hung limply from his lips and he passed a sweaty dirty hand over his steaming face. His thoughts were again with his company and he squirmed as he waited for word from them. His nerves screamed for release, some violent burst of energy that would exhaust and quiet their tautness.

Still nervous and irritable, the major looked up quickly when the figures darkened the doorway. Six bedraggled creatures shuffled into the room under the escort of the corporal, a Sten pointed at their backs, their hands locked behind their heads. Prisoners. The major looked them over as the corporal blurted out his story.

"I found these Jerries trying to sneak back in again, Major. What'll I do with them?"

For one silent second the major seemed entirely rational, then he snapped at the corporal: "For god's sake, man, don't bother me with prisoners! Haven't I got enough to do without worrying about them? Take them out and shoot them if you want to, get them the hell out of here!"

The corporal stood there for a moment, looking into the distorted face of the major. Then he nudged the reluctant prisoners towards the stairs with his Sten. As the sorry-looking group mounted the stone steps the major slumped, haggard and exhausted, to his wooden box again. He lit another cigarette from the one hanging in his lips and crumpled the cardboard box in his fist.

A Sten rattled harshly in the alleyway behind the house. It was unmistakable, a full mag blasted out. Everyone in the cellar whirled, electrified, first to gape at the major who sat there as if frozen, and then at the corporal as he came down the stairs, smacking a full mag into the Sten, his face indifferent to their stares.

The major stared blankly at the corporal as he settled himself in a corner of the cellar. Then he sagged wearily on the hard box, shoulders bowed with the invisible, staggering weight resting on the soiled and scuffed crowns.

Information You Can't Get Elsewhere

ASK ADVENTURE

OFFICERS for the Naval Reserve.

Query:—I would like to have information on the N.R.O.T.C. Would you refer me elsewhere if the material requested is too extensive to answer by mail.

—Herbert Pollack
Brooklyn, New York

Reply by Frank Herold:—The purpose of the Naval Reserve Officer Training Corps (NROTC) is to supply well-educated junior officers for the line and staff corps of the regular Navy and Marine Corps and to build up a reserve of trained officers who will be ready to serve their country in time of national emergency.

To outline the plan or to furnish full information on it would be quite voluminous by letter so I'll quote from the United States Navy Occupational Handbook:

"Candidates interested in further information on the NROTC program should consult their high school principal or college dean. If information is not available the school authority should write to the Chief of Naval Personnel (Attn: Pers 424), Bureau of Naval Personnel, Navy Department, Washington 25, D. C., and request "College Training Program—NROTC Bulletin of Information". Those interested in the contact student program should contact the professor of naval science at the college or university to which they wish to apply."

RECIPES for barbecue sauce.

Query:—Will you please give an old *Adventure* reader, if you can, a recipe for a sauce to be used for open pit barbecued mutton.

I am informed that you have some very good ones in the south. Give more than one if you can, please.

—J. A. Meyer
Bakersfield, Calif.

Reply by Paul M. Fink:—Every barbecue cook worthy of the name, and many who are not, has his own recipe for sauce. Some are jealously guarded, and the inventor would sooner part with his right eye than reveal the ingredients. Others are common property, even boasted about.

In the main they are mixed according to individual taste—whether one likes them hot or mild, with or without onions or garlic, etc. I am giving you three examples, with the thought that you can use any of them as a base, with such additions or changes as your own taste-buds may dictate.

1 qt. vinegar; 1 qt. tomatoes; 6 green peppers, chopped fine; 6 medium onions, minced; 1 bottle Worcestershire sauce; 1 tablespoon red pepper; 1 tablespoon black pepper; 1 tablespoon salt; ½ lb. butter; 1 tablespoon sugar; 1 tablespoon dry mustard. Mix and cook to blend, adding a little water if it seems too thick. Keep warm and baste the cooking meat with a rag on the end of a stick.

Melt ½ lb. butter. Add 1 cup mild vinegar, ½ cup tomato catsup, 2 tablespoons Worcestershire sauce, and the juice of a lemon. Mix 1 tablespoon dry mustard, ¼ teaspoon ceyenne pepper, 1 teaspoon black pepper, 1 teaspoon salt, ¼ cup sugar and add to the first when it has become well amalgamated. To all this add 2 grated

onions and a clove of garlic. Cook together about fifteen minutes, and use to baste as above.

1 qt. vinegar, 1 can tomatoes, 2 teaspoons red pepper, 2 teaspoon black pepper, 1 tablespoon salt, ¼ lb. butter. Simmer together until done and use to baste.

Some cooks follow the technique of basting the roasting meat with one of the above sauces, then eating the finished product sliced, either dry or with more of the sauce added. Others baste the meat with its own juices as it cooks, then chop the meat and pour the sauce over as it is served. For the first method, the sauce should be thinner in consistency, and water may be added as it cooks to achieve this. Chili powder may be substituted for pepper if desired. Some cooks melt the butter, or substitute olive or cooking oil for it, and brown the minced onions in this before adding the other ingredients. Others do not care for the flavor of tomatoes, and omit this entirely.

So look over these recipes, maybe try one or two, and then concoct one to your own liking. Keep quiet about just what is in it, and you can boast that "Meyer's Secret Formula Barbecue Sauce is the best in the World."

WEIGHT-lifting and track don't mix.

Query:—I would like your frank opinion of weight-lifting, as a general physical conditioner for other sports, and as a conditioner for track activities. Is there really such a thing as muscle-boundness? Is it caused by weight training in general or by incorrect weight training? Wouldn't the kind of chest, which some weight lifters have, give great lung capacity and stamina? Would heavy leg muscles, developed by weight-lifting be injurious to a runner? If so, would they be more harmful to a sprinter or a distance runner? Wouldn't arm and shoulder muscles acquired by weight-lifting aid in arm thrust for running? Do you think weight-lifting destroys co-ordination and reflexes essential to running and jumping? Are shot-putters ever successful in sports demanding grace and speed of movement like baseball and basketball? Why do the sports of swimming and track seem to be so incompatible? Is there truth in the statement that swimmers have "soft" muscles and "picture" physiques? Do they lack co-ordination and speed demanded by other sports?

Can you give me a progressive program of calisthenics and running designed to condition a body which has become very soft through dissipation and inactivity to the point where the legs and wind could take a full forty minutes of basketball three times a week without great stiffness? Does weight-lifting, swimming, or track make a football player's legs more susceptible to "charlie-horses?"

—Art Price
San Francisco, Calif.

Reply by Jackson Scholz:—To the best of my knowledge weight lifting and track athletics do not mix. In fact I do not know, off hand, any other sport in which weight lifting might prove beneficial because of the fact that weight lifting develops a highly specialized set of muscles which tend toward bunchiness and could be detrimental in other sports. Even the weight events in track require long flexible muscles. Men who compete in these events are often good at other sports requiring speed and grace.

Swimming muscles are also specialized, but swimmers cannot be considered as soft. There is no reason I can see why a swimmer might not be easily adaptable to other sports.

Almost any form of moderate exercise is recommended for a person who wishes to reclaim flabby muscles. The only warning to be heeded is to take things easy at the start. Don't overdo it. Don't exhaust yourself. If you are aiming toward basketball don't use weight lifting as a conditioner. Running, stretching exercises and general calisthenics will put you in first class shape if you stick to it. A large chest developed by weight lifting is a matter of muscles rather than of lung capacity. Lung capacity is developed by prolonged exercise, and depends largely upon the muscles of the heart which pump blood to the lungs.

Weight lifting would make a man's legs susceptible to charlie-horses if he tries an abrupt change to another sport which requiries long, loose muscles.

INNER tubes for rubber boats.

Query:—You may remember that several months ago I wrote and asked if you knew where I might procure new inner tubes for my army surplus raft. Well, I never did find a place to buy them, but being a graduate mechanical engineer with 30 years of manufacturing experience I decided to start experimenting with various kinds of natural rubber, synthetic rubber, plastics, cements and vulcanizing equipment. I have now produced a very satisfactory plastic inner tube, one that is stronger than rubber, will not age as rubber does, and is impervious to oil which has ruined many a rubber craft. The new tubes are actually stronger than the originals were. Boats which never did have inner tubes can be converted and equipped with tubes which would of course make them much stronger than they were originally. I have all of the necessary forms and other equipment now. If you know of anyone who is having leak trouble with his rubber raft, I will be very glad to do what I can to help him.

I am mighty glad that I found a way out of my difficulties. I sure would have hated to give up that boat. For four years I enjoyed its convenience and safety. As I told you it would ride out the worst Yellow-

(Continued on page 123)

ASK ADVENTURE EXPERTS

THE ASK ADVENTURE SERVICE is free, provided self-addressed envelope and FULL POSTAGE for reply are enclosed. Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries must enclose International Reply Coupons, which are exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union. **Air Mail** is quicker for foreign service!

Send each question *direct* to the expert in charge of the section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. **Do Not** send questions to the magazine, unless so indicated (c/o *Adventure*). Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question. The magazine does not assume any responsibility. **No Reply** will be made to requests for partners, financial backing or employment.

★*(Enclose addressed envelope with International Reply Coupon.)*

SPORTS AND HOBBIES

American Folklore and Legend: *Songs, dances, regional customs; African survivals, religious sects; voodoo*—HAROLD PREECE, c/o *Adventure.*

Archery—EARL B. POWELL, c/o *Adventure.*

Auto Racing—WALT WOESTMAN, 2310 Midlothian Drive, Altadena, Calif.

Baseball—FREDERICK LIEB, c/o *Adventure.*

Basketball—STANLEY CARHART, 99 Broad St., Mattawan, N. J.

Big Game Hunting in North America: *Guides and equipment*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Boxing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, c/o *Adventure.*

Camping and Outdoor Cookery—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Canoeing—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

Coins and Medals—WILLIAM L. CLARK, American Numismatic Society, Broadway at 156th, N. Y. C.

Fencing—COL. JOHN V. GROMBACH, c/o *Adventure.*

Fishing, Fresh water: *Fly and bait casting; bait casting outfits; fishing trips*—JOHN ALDEN KNIGHT, 929 W. 4th St., Williamsport, Penna.

Fishing, Salt water: *Bottom fishing, surf casting; trolling; equipment and locations*—C. BLACKBURN MILLER, c/o *Adventure.*

Fly and Bait Casting Tournaments—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Maine.

Globetrotting and Vagabonding—NORMAN D. FORD, *c/o Adventure.*

Hiking—DR. CLAUDE P. FORDYCE, c/o *Adventure.*

Horses and Horsemanship—JOHN RICHARD YOUNG, c/o *Adventure.*

Lost Treasure: *Tales of lost mines and treasure*—Raymond Dow, 15 Park Row, New York 7, N. Y.

Motor Boating—GERALD T. WHITE, Montville, N. J.

Motorcycling: *Regulations, mechanics, racing*—CHARLES M. DODGE, c/o *Adventure.*

Piracy and Buccaneering: *Exploits, plunders, lives and deaths of pirates in history and legend*—DR. CHARLES H. KNICKERBOCKER, 12 Mt. Desert St., Bar Harbor, Me.

Rifles, Pistols, Revolvers: *American and Foreign*—DONEGAN WIGGINS, 3325 Liberty Rd., Salem, Oregon.

Shotguns: *American and foreign; wing shooting and field trials; gunsmithing*—ROY S. TINNEY, Brielle, N. J.

Skiing—WILLIAM C. CLAPP, The Mountain Book Shop, North Conway, N. H.

Small Boating and Cruising: *Skiffs, sailboats, powerboats, outboards*—COL. ROLAND BIRNN, The Chesapeake Skipper, 213 West St., Annapolis, Md.

Songs of Campfire, Foc'sle and Bunkhouse—HARRY KIRBY MCCLINTOCK, 3911 So. Pacific Ave., San Pedro, Calif.

Swimming—LOUIS DEB. HANDLEY, 115 West 11th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Track—JACKSON SCHOLZ, R. D. No. 2, Doylestown, Pa.

Woodcraft—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

Wrestling—MURL E. THRUSH, New York Athletic Club, 59th St. and 7th Ave., N. Y., N. Y.

SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL SUBJECTS

Anthropology: *American, north of the Panama Canal; customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions*—ARTHUR WOODWARD, Los Angeles Museum, Exposition Park, Los Angeles, Calif.

Entomology: *Insects and spiders; venomous and disease-carrying insects*—DR. S. W. FROST, 465 E. Foster Ave., State College, Penna.

Forestry, North American: *The U.S. Forestry Service, our national forests, conservation and use*—A. H. CARHART, c/o *Adventure.*

Forestry, Tropical: *Tropical forests and products*—WM. R BARBOUR, care of U. S. Forest Service, Glenn Bldg., Atlanta, Ga.

Herpetology: *Reptiles and amphibians*—CLIFFORD H. POPE, c/o *Adventure*.

Horology: *The science of time and timekeepers*—JOHN W. MCGRATH, 434 W. 120th St., N. Y., N. Y.

Mining, Prospecting, and Precious Stones: *Anywhere in North America, Prospectors' outfitting; any mineral, metallic or non-metallic*—VICTOR SHAW, c/o *Adventure*.

Photography: *Outfitting, work in out-of-the way places; general information*—PAUL L. ANDERSON, 36 Washington St., East Orange, N. J.

Radio: *Telegraphy, telephony history; receiver construction, portable sets*—DONALD MCNICOL, c/o *Adventure*.

Railroads: *In the United States, Mexico and Canada*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill.

Sawmilling: HAPSBURG LIEBE, c/o *Adventure*.

MILITARY, NAVAL AND POLICE

United States Army—COL. R. G. EMERY, U.S.A. Ret., c/o *Adventure*.

United States Coast Guard—LIEUT. C. B. LEMON, U.S.C.G., Ret., Box 221, Equinunk, Wayne Co., Penna.

United States Marine Corps—MAJ. ROBERT H. RANKIN, U.S.M.C., c/o *Adventure*.

United States Navy—FRANK HEROLD, 1647 Charon Rd., Jacksonville, Fla.

Merchant Marine—KERMIT W. SALYER, c/o *Adventure*.

Military Aviation—O. B. MYERS, c/o *Adventure*.

Federal Investigation Activities—*Secret Service, Immigration, Customs, Border Patrol, etc.*—FRANCIS H. BENT, c/o *Adventure*.

The French Foreign Legion—GEORGE C. APPELL, c/o *Adventure*.

Royal Canadian Mounted Police—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada.

State Police—FRANCIS H. BENT, c/o *Adventure*.

GEOGRAPHICAL SUBJECTS

★New Guinea—L. P. B. ARMIT, c/o *Adventure*.

★New Zealand, Cook Island, Samoa—TOM L. MILLS, 27 Bowen St., Feilding, New Zealand.

★Australia—ALAN FOLEY, 243 Elizabeth St., Sydney, Australia.

★South Sea Islands—WILLIAM MCCREADIE, 69 Palace St., Ashfield, N. S. W., Australia.

Hawaii, Christmas, Wake, Canton, Midway and Palmyra Islands—CARL J. KUNZ, 211-3 Naska, Kahului, Maui, T.H.

Africa, Part 1 ★*Libya, Morocco, Egypt, Tunis, Algeria, Anglo-Egyptian Sudan*—CAPT. H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **2** *Abyssinia, Italian Somaliland, British Somali Coast Protectorate, Eritrea, Uganda, Tanganyika, Kenya*—GORDON MACCREAGH, c/o *Adventure*. **3** *Tripoli, Sahara caravans*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, c/o *Adventure*. **4** *Bechuanaland, Southern Africa, Angola, Belgian Congo, Egyptian Sudan and French West Africa*—MAJOR S. L. GLENISTER, c/o *Adventure*.

Madagascar—RALPH LINTON, Dept. of Anthropology, Columbia University, N. Y., N. Y.

Asia, Part 1 ★*Siam, Malay States, Straits Settlements, Java, Sumatra, Dutch East Indies, Ceylon*—V. B. WINDLE, Box 813, Rancho Santa Fe, Calif. **2** *Persia, Arabia*—CAPTAIN BEVERLY-GIDDINGS, c/o *Adventure*. **3** ★*Palestine*—CAPTAIN H. W. EADES, 3808 West 26th Ave., Vancouver, B. C. **4** ★*Afghanistan, Northern India, Kashmir, Khyber Pass*—ROLAND WILD, Savage Club, 1 Carlton House Terrace, London, S.W.1, England.

★The British Isles—THOMAS BOWEN PARTINGTON, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., London, W. C. 2, England.

South America, Part 1 *Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile*—EDGAR YOUNG, c/o *Adventure*. **2** *Brazil*—ARTHUR J. BURKS, c/o *Adventure*.

West Indies—JOHN B. LEFFINGWELL, c/o *Adventure*.

Baffinland and Greenland—VICTOR SHAW, c/o *Adventure*.

★Newfoundland—CAPT. LEO C. MURPHY, J.P., Great War Veterans' Office, St. John's, Newfoundland.

Mexico, Part 1 *Northern Border States*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex. **2** ★*West Coast beginning with State of Sinaloa; Central and Southern Mexico, including Tabasco, Chiapas, Campeche, Quintana Roo and Yucatan*—WALLACE MONTGOMERY, Central Sanalona, S. A., Costa Rica. Sinaloa, Mexico.

Canada, Part 1 ★*Southeastern Quebec*—WILLIAM MACMILLAN, 89 Laurentide Ave., Quebec, Canada. **2** ★*Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario*—HARRY M. MOORE, 579 Isabella, Pembroke, Ont., Canada. **3** ★*Northern Saskatchewan; Indian Life and language, hunting, trapping*—H. S. M. KEMP, 501 10th St., E., Prince Albert, Sask., Canada. **4** ★*Yukon, British Columbia, Northwest Territories, Alberta, Western Arctic*—PHILIP H. GODSELL, F. R. G. S., 531 A. 15th St. South, Lethbridge, Alberta, Canada.

Alaska—FRANK RICHARDSON PIERCE, c/o *Adventure*.

Western U. S., Part 1—*Pacific Coast States*—FRANK WINCH, c/o *Adventure*. **2** *New Mexico; Indians, etc.*—H. F. ROBINSON, 1412 West Fruit, Albuquerque, New Mexico. **3** *Nevada, Montana and Northern Rockies*—FRED W. EGELSTON, P. O. Box 297, Elko, Nev. **4** *Idaho and environs*—R. T. NEWMAN, 701 N. Main St., Paris, Ill. **5** *Arizona, Utah*—C. C. ANDERSON, 616 N. 3rd St., Phoenix, Ariz. **6** *Texas, Oklahoma*—J. W. WHITEAKER, 2903 San Gabriel St., Austin, Tex.

Eastern U. S., Part 1 *Maine*—"CHIEF" STANWOOD, East Sullivan, Me. **2** *Vt., N. H., Conn., R. I., Mass.*—HOWARD R. VOIGHT, P. O. Box 716, Woodmont, Conn. **3** *Chesapeake Bay and tributaries; inland waterways, New York to Florida*—COL. ROLAND BIRNN, The Chesapeake Skipper, 213 West St., Annapolis, Md. **4** *Ala., Tenn., Miss., N. C. S. C., Fla., Ga.*—HAPSBURG LIEBE, c/o *Adventure*. **5** *The Great Smokies and Appalachian Mountains south of Virginia*—PAUL M. FINK, Jonesboro, Tenn.

(Continued from page 120)

stone Lake storms, and convenient—it could be carried on a pack horse, in the trunk of a car or on my shoulder to lakes which otherwise could not have been fished.

—Stevens T. Norvell
Western Springs, Ill.

Reply by H. S. M. Kemp:—I'm glad to hear you had such success with your experimentations regarding plastic tubes for your rubber boat. I'm passing the letter along to the editor of *Adventure*—and there will doubtless be a lot of the boys who will be calling for help, for I imagine you've really got something there.

We were wondering about getting one of these rafts ourselves. We live in a lake country, and a wooden boat or a big canoe is a chore to haul around. We like fishing, too, only fishing is something I can take or leave alone. You'd be surprised how fishing commercially through the ice at 50 below or netting fish for the table and a string of sleigh-dogs the year 'round dulls one's enthusiasm for much more of it.

Still, we fish; and if we haven't got into one of those many and little-known lakes where the big ones really are, it's only because we lack the portable sort of boat. So mebbe we'll have to look into this rubber-raft business some more. Cheerio!

STOCK car racing.

Query:—Will you tell me what is meant by stock car racing? I was under the impression that it was a strictly stock car without any added accessories whatsoever—in short, just as it was turned out of the factory. I would appreciate it if you would set me straight on this question.

—Frank Hineman
Adok, Alaska

Reply by Walt Woestman:—By the rules of the Contest Board of the American Automobile Association, stock car racing is exactly that!

So if we are to consider the AAA as being the governing body, which they most undoubtedly are in all of the really big races, we find that a stock car is exactly as it is delivered from the factory, with nothing added or nothing removed.

In the past—quite a number of years ago, since 1950 is the first time that AAA has sanctioned stock car racing for many years—it was permissible to remove fenders, mufflers, windshields and a few other things. It was at one time (1934) permissible to use truck tie rods, as it was found that the stock rods of passenger cars bent under the strain, but this only after the Ford factory agreed to equip 100 cars with these rods, which made them an optional stock accessory.

It is unfortunate that some racing organi-

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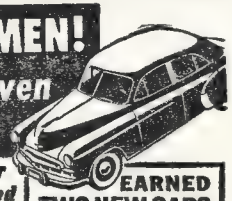

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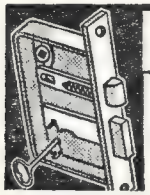

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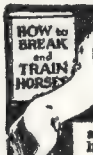

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zations sanction what they term stock cars, which are after all nothing but "hard top hot-rods" with hopped up engines etc. This causes much confusion among the general public and has been the cause of much ill feeling and bickering. So for actual stock car racing the AAA ruling must, for the time, be considered as final.

A LITTLE hunting for big game.

Query:—My cousin and I are interested in taking a week off to do a little big game hunting. We would like to go to some part of Texas that is exceptionally wild, and that has plenty of deer, and wild pig.

What time of the year would be the best to undertake the trip? What kind of game laws? Are game licenses needed?

The two of us, my cousin, 19, and myself intend to go alone. Could you suggest anything in the way of light equipment? What part of the state would be the best bet?

—Raymond Herwald
Giddings, Texas

Reply by Arthur H. Carhart:—The wilder part of Texas lies over toward the Big Bend country. From Uvalde westward there is deer country. You'll find the southwestern type of white-tail deer in that section. It also is in this area that you will find "wild pig," or javelina, or peccary whichever name you prefer.

Of course you will need hunting licenses and you will have to hunt in season. Contact your nearest game warden for a copy of the laws governing hunting or write the information division of your state game and fish department at Austin for copies. They also will be able to direct you more specifically to where their current game census indicates there will be the best hunting.

As to equipment, you can go rough or with some comfort. Hunting is rough enough in itself if you really work at it, that you will appreciate comfort in camp after a day in the field. At least a light tent for sleeping should go along. That's shelter. You can sleep on the ground with a tarp under you, places scooped out for shoulders and hips, blankets for covers if you wish, but I prefer a pneumatic mattress. Good sleeping is better assurance of not being so stiff and sore in the morning that you hate to travel. Simple cooking utensils are essential, of course. You actually can make a good "nesting set" of pots, even cups, from tin cans which will serve. Or pick up a "nesting set" from the local five-and-ten store. Or a good aluminum set with pots, frying pan, plates, cups and other eatin' tools does not cost too much and all you need is in it. Shelter, a comfortable bed and required cooking equipment are the minimum in any camp.

THE END

(Continued from page 10)

During all the time that he was about he never moved at more than two or three miles an hour, but I have no doubt that he could move very fast if he wanted to. Watching him gave one a sense of his great power, and several people from the ship mentioned that they got a strong impression that he was hunting humans and was disappointed at not finding any within his reach.

An elderly Mexican of about 70 years age, who had lived all his life in and about the Gulf, said that once, about twenty years ago, a manta ray about that size had come to the island and had been around for several hours. He thought that this one might be the same one. Smaller rays, though quite large, come near the docks several times a year, but can always be frightened away by throwing rocks at them, according to the people who live there. These usually are about 5 to 10 feet across, and they are greatly feared by swimmers.

The following morning we left the island at daybreak and when about ten miles down the Gulf on our course we were in smooth calm water with a very slight swell. For some ten miles we ran through a school of manta rays, lazily floating on the surface and doing nothing. I should say that at least thirty to forty could be seen from either side of the ship at once while we were among them. I don't believe that any of these were more than eight or nine feet across. None of them showed any sign of fearing the ship, and they would allow the ship to pass within fifty feet of them without movement, except that they would slowly turn to face the ship as it passed—possibly to watch it. Among those that were some distance away from the ship, once in a while one would lazily turn a sideways flip-flop, seeming to stand on one flipper tip as his whole heavy body turned a half jump and half flop. I would have been interested in seeing just how they accomplished this handling of their great weight, but none did it near enough to the ship to be closely observed.

One other thing, since this is, after all, a fish story, there is one more fact that is important. For several days before meeting that giant fish, and for several days after meeting him, I had nothing to drink. Also, as far as I am concerned that fish can have just any part of the ocean that he wants. [Me too!—Ed.]

NEWS ITEM: Next month's issue of *Adventure* marks the fortieth anniversary of this magazine's continuous publication. Naturally, we're going to do our darndest to make that November edition a real humdinger. Hope you'll be on hand to enjoy it—K.W.G.

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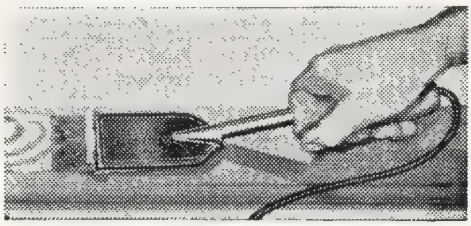

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LOST TRAILS

NOTE: We offer this department to readers who wish to get in touch again with friends or acquaintances separated by years or chance. Give your own name and full address. Please notify *Adventure* immediately should you establish contact with the person you are seeking. Space permitting, each inquiry addressed to *Lost Trails* will be run in three consecutive issues. Requests by and concerning women are declined as not considered effective in a magazine published for men. *Adventure* also will decline any notice that may not seem a sincere effort to recover an old friendship, or that may not seem suitable to the editors for any other reason. No charge is made for publication of notices.

I would like to contact Walter Jones whose last address was Jersey City, New Jersey. He is about 24 years old, wears eyeglasses, 6 feet tall, and weighed about 190 lbs. Last heard of him when we separated in the city of New Orleans in January 1946. At that time he was shipping with the Seafarers International Union. Anyone knowing his present whereabouts, please write William J. Whalen, 70 South Huntington Avenue, Boston, Mass.

I am very anxious to locate a friend's son. She hasn't seen him for many years. His name is Raymond Walter Beehler—born in Chicago, raised in Elkhart, Indiana. Please write Mrs. Mary Geyer, General Delivery, San Diego, California.

I would appreciate hearing from anyone knowing the whereabouts of Ray L. Edwards, serial no. 33538649. We served together in Italy in 1943-44-45 with PWB (OWI). His home state is Virginia. Write Earl Marks, University of Oregon, Cherney Hall, Room 216, Eugene, Oregon.

Would appreciate hearing from any of the U. S. Marines who were members of the First Marine Aviation Force, Northern Bombing Group or the members of the First Marine Aeronautic Company during World War I. The Northern Bombing Group served in France and the First Marine Aeronautic Company did submarine patrol in the Azores Islands. W. P. T. Hill, Major General, U. S. Marine Corps, c/o Headquarters Marine Corps, Wash. 25, D. C.

I would like to locate Samuel Work, the oldest brother of Frank and Albert Work, formerly of Chicago. He could be in the auto or clothing business. Chances are he might be somewhere around Los Angeles, California, or a town nearby. Please forward any information to Monroe Work, 750 So. State St., Elgin Ill.

I would like to contact Jerry Gilmore, whom I lost track of about two years ago. He and I both worked at Stockton, California. He lived on the West Coast around Point Arena. Write Earle Donald Fowler, 421 B Street, Hayward, California.

I would appreciate hearing from anyone knowing the whereabouts of T/5 Reinder Kars. Last address, Service Co. 309th Infantry Regt., serial no. 36450114. Previously attached to tank destroyer outfit Camp Hood, Texas. Write Edward Morris, 119 N. Kenilworth Avenue, Oak Park, Illinois.

I am anxious to hear from Pete Burkoski. He was at one time (about 1939) a trainer and handler of elephants for Barnum and Bailey's Circus. About 40 years old, 5' 6" tall, husky build. Last heard from in 1941, when he was a patient in a Staten Island Hospital (New York). Write Charles J. Koerner, 10 Castle Creek Road, Binghamton, RD 4, N. Y.

Will any former member of the Adventure Pen Club please write Frank G. Babylon, 2055 Dartmore St., Pittsburgh 10, Penna.

I am trying to find my father, Noble H. McGinnis. When last heard of he was operating a funeral home somewhere in Okla. Pvt. Wm. H. McGinnis, RA 26964691, 111th Engr. Supply Co. Apo 942 c/o PM, Seattle, Washington.

Will anyone knowing George W. Spiegelberg, please ask him to get in touch with me? I think his home is in New York City. Carlos M. Diaz, M. Calle 29th, No. 1809, Chihuahua, Chih, Mexico.

Veterans who served in Dutch Harbor are planning a reunion in Chicago in 1950. We are eager to hear from Naval and Marine personnel who served at N.O.B., N.A.S., and N.A.F. from 1941 to the fall of 1945. Write J. Matthews, 5321 North Ashland, Chicago 40, Ill.

Would appreciate hearing from anyone knowing the whereabouts of Walter Coppinger, stationed in Panama around the time of the first World War. He was discharged from the Army at Fort Benning, Georgia. Please notify James Corrigan, 1225 Bloomfield Street, Hoboken, N.J.

Would like information of Army buddies' whereabouts: John Kowal, Hamtramck, Mich.; Harry Gottfriedd, Chicago; John Tyson, N. Y. C. All of the 31st MRC (ETO) last seen in Chantilly. Also Emil de Roseby, 29th Inf. Div., last seen near Frankfurt A/M. Write John F. Laughlin, 4719 N. Cicero Ave., Chicago 30, Ill.

I am trying to locate a friend and Army buddy, Hovey Murphy. Anyone knowing his address would do a great favor by writing Tony T. Perkins, Route No. 8, Box 626, Salem, Oregon.

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(Continued from page 71)

wing, he managed to convince himself that his suspicion of foul-play was merely an unreasonable prejudice against inferior people, and that the Battle of Sambor was in all respects a just and honorable engagement.

As the first long swells and sweet salt-laden breeze of the open sea unwound his nerves and composed his spirit, the commodore retired to his gently swaying cabin and sat down at his desk to explain, in his tortured script, how he had, possibly, happened to start another world war. With the fitful spectre of a general court-martial guiding his pen, he proceeded to marshal the evidence that would conclusively establish his innocence on the age-old plea of self-defense.

IT should be easy. It was simply a case of who hit whom first. And certainly that field piece had hit him first. It was a good thing that it had been silenced after one shot. If it had continued firing .... field piece! FIELD PIECE! Field piece—field piece—field piece—the commodore was thumbing rapidly through the Ammanese list of captured material. No field piece. Had the boy president mentioned any enemy field pieces? No. Had the pilot? "Only mortars," he said. The commodore nervously searched the government range chart returned by the gunnery officer. No field piece. The commodore sat back in the chair, staring at nothing.

So that was it. So that was the trick. A government field piece beyond the cliffs, in the jungle, to trigger his temper into opening fire. And a staged riot, to heat it up in advance. But that was crack shooting, even with a prepared range chart. I wonder, mused the commodore—I wonder if that perfumed Oxford scholar aimed it himself. The commodore struggled with his first incipient admiration for a politician.

There was a chance, of course—just a chance—that he was wrong—that that distinctive shot that had been followed so quickly by the hit on the flagship hadn't been a field piece at all—or at any rate had at least been fired by the Reds, and not by a government gun. The flagship's

gunnery officer might know—he could see better from his higher station on the firecontrol tower.

The commodore reached for the dial phone hanging on the side of his desk. No. No use letting the cat out of the bag that way. There was a better way. He dug the president's gift from under the pile of papers on the desk and tore off the gaudy wrappings. He unlatched the flat green plush box and opened it, half expecting some monstrous joke—some jack-in-the-box contrivance to fly out at him.

Instead, a small card slid out to the desk, uncovering a dazzling gold medal in the shape of a sunburst the size of a small saucer, strung on a wide red-and-gold brocade ribbon.

The commodore picked up the card. *"Your decoration, sir,"* it read, in a neat, flowing hand, *"Amman's highest honor—the Order of Everlasting Light. Please accept it as a pledge from every loyal Ammanese that there will never be a court-martial if it is in our power to prevent it.*

Most respectfully,
Niai Lieu."

The commodore weighed the medal in his hand, examining it. It was heavy—heavy as solid gold, and sparkled with a galaxy of small rubies and diamonds. On the back it had been neatly engraved in English.

The commodore held it under the desk light and read:

Presented to
CAPTAIN PHILLIP N. BARRY
U. S. NAVY
Savior of Amman
A warrior of steel whose temper was ever reliable
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A GRATEFUL NATION

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WHAT YOU CAN DO ABOUT

HAIR LOSS

ITCHY SCALP, DANDRUFF, HEAD SCALES, SEBORRHEA, EXCESSIVE FALLING HAIR

The following facts are brought to the attention of the public because of a widespread belief that nothing can be done about hair loss. This belief has no basis in medical fact. Worse, it has condemned many men and women to needless baldness by their neglect to treat certain accepted causes of hair loss.

There are six principal types of hair loss, or *alopecia*, as it is known in medical terms:

1. Alopecia from diseases of the scalp
2. Alopecia from other diseases or from an improper functioning of the body
3. Alopecia of the aged (senile baldness)
4. Alopecia areata (loss of hair in patches)
5. Alopecia of the young (premature baldness)
6. Alopecia at birth (congenital baldness)

Senile, premature and congenital alopecia cannot be helped by anything now known to modern science. Alopecia from improper functioning of the body requires the advice and treatment of your family physician.

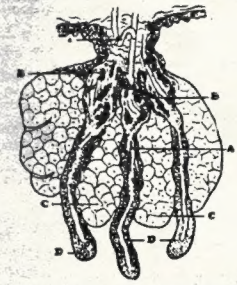
BUT MANY MEDICAL AUTHORITIES NOW BELIEVE A SPECIFIC SCALP DISEASE IS THE MOST COMMON CAUSE OF HAIR LOSS.

This disease is called Seborrhea and can be broadly classified into two clinical forms with the following symptoms:

1. ***DRY SEBORRHEA:*** The hair is dry, lifeless, and without gloss. A dry flaky dandruff is usually present with accompanying itchiness. Hair loss is considerable and increases with the progress of this disease.

2. ***OILY SEBORRHEA:*** The hair and scalp are oily and greasy. The hair is slightly sticky to the touch and has a tendency to mat together. Dandruff takes the form of head scales. Scalp is usually itchy. Hair loss is severe with baldness as the end result.

Many doctors agree that to NEGLECT these symptoms of DRY and OILY SEBORRHEA is to INVITE BALDNESS.



DESTRUCTION OF HAIR FOLLICLES
Caused By Seborrhea
A — Dead hairs; B — Hair-destroying bacteria; C — Hypertrophied sebaceous glands; D — Atrophic follicles.

Seborrhea is believed to be caused by three germ organisms — staphylococcus albus, pityrosporum ovale, and acnes bacillus.

These germs attack the sebaceous gland causing an abnormal working of this fat gland. The hair follicle, completely surrounded by the enlarged diseased sebaceous gland, then begins to atrophy. The hair produced becomes smaller and smaller until the hair follicle dies. Baldness is the inevitable result. (See illustration.)

But seborrhea can be controlled, particularly in its early stages. The three germ organisms believed to cause seborrhea, can and should be eliminated before they destroy your normal hair growth.

A post-war development, Comate Medicinal Formula kills these three germ organisms on contact. Proof of Comate's germ-killing properties has been demonstrated in laboratory tests recently conducted by one of the leading testing laboratories in America. (Complete report on file and copies are available on request.)

When used as directed, Comate Medicinal Formula controls seborrhea—stimulates the flow of blood to the scalp—helps stop scalp itch and burn—improves the appearance of your hair and scalp—helps STOP HAIR LOSS due to seborrhea. Your hair looks more attractive and alive.

You may safely follow the example of thousands who first were skeptical, then curious, and finally decided to avail themselves of Comate Medicinal Formula.

A Few of the Many Grateful Expressions By Users of Comate Medicinal Formula

"My hair was coming out for years and I tried everything. Nothing stopped it until I tried Comate. Now my hair has stopped coming out. It looks so much thicker. My friends have noticed my hair and they all say it looks so much better." —Mrs. R.E.J., Stevenson, Ala.

"Your hair formula got rid of my dandruff; my head does not itch any more. I think it is the best of all of the formulas I have used."—E.E., Hamilton, Ohio.

"Your formula is everything you claim it to be and the first 10 days trial freed me of a very bad case of dry seborrhea." —J.E.M., Long Beach, Calif.

"I do want to say that just within five days I have obtained a great improvement in my hair. I do want to thank you and the Comate Laboratories for producing such a wonderful and amazing formula."—M.M., Johnstown, Pa.

"I have found almost instant relief. My itching has stopped with one application."—J.N., Stockton, Calif.

"My hair looks thicker, not falling out like it used to. Will not be without Comate in the house."—R.W., Lonsdale, R. I.

"I haven't had any trouble with dandruff since I started using Comate."—L.W.W., Galveston, Tex.

"This formula is everything if not more than you say it is. I am very happy with what it's doing for my hair." —T.J., Las Cruces, New Mexico

"I find it stops the itch and retards the hair fall. I am thankful for the help it has given me in regard to the terrible itchiness."—R.B.L., Philadelphia, Pa.

"The bottle of Comate I got from you has done my hair so much good. My hair has been coming out and breaking off for about 21 years. It has improved so much." —Mrs. J.E., Lisbon, Ga.

Today these benefits are available to you just as they were to these sincere men and women when they first read about Comate. If your hair is thinning, over-dry or over-oily—if you are troubled with dandruff with increasing hair loss—you may well be guided by the laboratory tests and the experience of thousands of grateful men and women.

Remember, if your hair loss is due to Seborrhea, Comate CAN and MUST help you. If it is due to causes beyond the reach of Comate Medicinal Formula, you have nothing to lose because our GUARANTY POLICY assures the return of your money unless delighted. So why delay when that delay may cause irreparable damage to your hair and scalp. Just mail the coupon below.

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1432 Broadway, New York 18, N. Y.

Please rush my bottle (30-days supply) of Comate Hair and Scalp Formula in plain wrapper. I must be completely satisfied or you guarantee refund of my money upon return of bottle and unused portion.

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☐ Send C.O.D. I will pay postman $5.00 plus postal charges.

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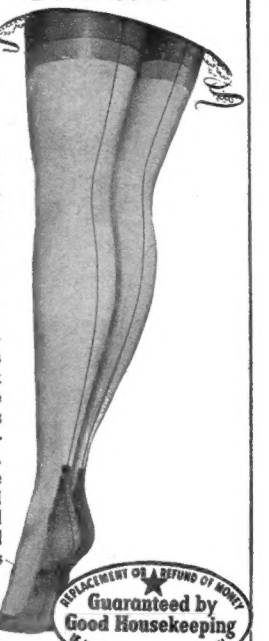

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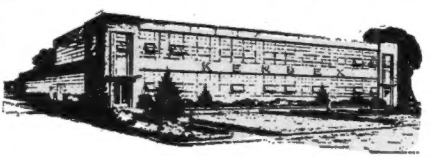

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